





A SHERBURNE ROMANCE

THE SHERBURNE SERIES.

SHERBURNE HOUSE.

LYNDELL SHERBURNE.

SHERBURNE COUSINS.

A SHERBURNE ROMANCE.

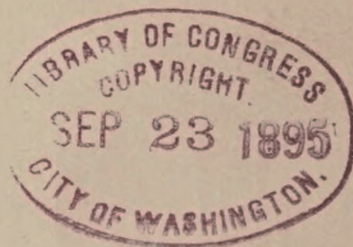
By AMANDA M. DOUGLAS.

A SHERBURNE ROMANCE

BY

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"SHERBURNE COUSINS," "LARRY," "IN WILD
ROSE TIME," ETC.



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TO
GRACE ADELLE WILLIS.

THAT THE PROMISE OF GIRLHOOD MAY UNFOLD AND RIPEN
INTO SERENE AND HAPPY
WOMANHOOD IS THE WISH OF HER FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

Newark, N. J., 1895.

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A SHERBURNE ROMANCE.

CHAPTER I.

A LONG DEFERRED MEETING.

THE opera was "Siegfried." It was half through when Leonard Beaumanoir entered the well-filled house and walked slowly down the outside aisle. Some of the groups he passed turned a curious glance upon him. His fine figure and imperious face impelled attention as he ran his eyes over the elegant assemblage in a slow, scrutinizing manner. Down one row and up another, quite regardless of the magnificent *Brünnhilde*. Across on the other side he espied the party of his search. He might not have instantly recognized the large, fair, middle-aged man with the coloring of health and energy in his face, but surely there was Mrs. Fanshawe, and the proud, erect girl, with the spirited face full of intense interest, was his cousin Dell Sherburne.

The certainty somehow ruffled his whole frame, mentally and physically, as a gust of wind stirs a hitherto tranquil lake. He had not exchanged a word with her since the night of the broken engagement six months before. He had settled to the fact that they would meet some time when the bitterness had grown cold, and he would make a new proffer that would bring about a different decision. By it

he would be rehabilitated in his own esteem. He had schooled himself to a good deal of patient endeavor, but still kept alive a flame of indignation at her childish injustice.

What was this peculiar power of hers? Standing here with his eyes fixed on her eager, intent face, unconscious of all save the music, he did not feel so firmly intrenched in the right as he had even half an hour ago.

The face beside her, looking out of a fluff of hair neither light nor dark, but with a soft cloudiness that framed in its delicacy and daintiness, attracted him curiously. It was full of soft curves, of peace and gentleness, a certain subtle harmony. The profile, when she turned a little, was pure enough for a carving. The lips had just a touch of fullness in the middle, but you could almost see the tremor of emotion in them. There was no self-consciousness. She did not even seem aware that other eyes were fixed on her with any sense of admiration. When the scene ended she glanced about in an innocent fashion and said something to Dell, with a quiver of the lip and a soft mistiness of the eyes that made her fascinating.

“That must be Tessy,” Leonard said in his thought, recalling the sweet child face that had bent over him with such solicitude when he was lying helpless and despondent after his accident, and the Murrays had first been admitted within the sacred precincts of Sherburne House. “How beautiful she is—no, that is not the word, either. There ought to be a new one coined to meet her case,” and he smiled.

Then he felt a little vexed that any woman should appeal to him in that manner. He let his eyes wander about the audience. There was no lack of

beautiful women—or was it the exquisite dressing, the silks and laces, the plumes waving with the slightest stir, and the dainty opera cloaks?

He was lucky to find them so easily. He picked his way around to the other side while the orchestra was playing, but he would not disturb them with his errand, or run the risk of a seeming impertinence to his Cousin Lyndell. Indeed, in the last magnificent act he almost lost sight of them himself.

He stood quite still when the performance had ended. They were going out at the other end of the row, he observed. He followed the throng to intercept them in the lobby. Mr. Murray had Dell; Mrs. Fanshawe followed close behind with Tessy, who looked like a little white nun in her furry cloak.

“Oh!” Dell uttered a sudden exclamation as she came face to face with her cousin, and a scarlet flush mounted to her brow.

“Mr. Murray,” putting out his hand, and for the moment forgetting his severe dignity as he half smiled toward Lyndell, “pardon my surprising you in this manner. I had a message for my cousin, and calling at your house learned you were here.”

“Aunt Aurelia?” Dell’s voice was breathless with sudden alarm.

“Aunt Aurelia, Aunt Julia, and all at Beaumanoir are well,” he hastened to say. Then he shook hands with Mrs. Fanshawe and reached over to Tessy.

“You see I have not forgotten you,” smilingly. “You have not grown out of remembrance, but you ought to be polite enough to admit that I have. I hope I have improved since the time that an invalid’s couch was my only home.”

“You have only made a change from illness to

health. I should have known you," and the sweet curve of the lips was a half smile.

The voice was what one might expect, but it had a trained, softened sound, while it was distinct, individualized.

"Oh," said Dell, recovering herself, "I was so afraid——"

They emerged into the main entrance, but she stood curiously uncertain.

"I am commissioned to bring you home," he began, in explanation. "And I am the bearer of sad tidings. Uncle Lepage went to his last rest yesterday. It was not unexpected, for Aunt Edith was sent for on Saturday."

"Come home with us, and you can arrange with your cousin. The carriage is waiting, no doubt," said the elder man.

They soon found it. Mr. Murray put Leonard inside with the ladies.

"Poor Uncle Lepage!" Lyndell said softly. "I did not know he was worse."

"He had a third stroke last Friday evening, though he had seemed unusually bright for some days, but Dr. Carew thought the end could not be far off. Aunt Edith was summoned, but he never recovered consciousness. They were to come up to Washington to-day. The funeral will be on Saturday."

The elders had all known what the end must be. Yet, to the young, death is always a surprise.

"Gifford——" she began slowly.

"Gifford has been a great comfort to his father, to them all. He certainly has redeemed himself. Aunt Aurelia has grown very fond of him. But he looks worn and tired out."

Dell gave a little thanksgiving in her heart. She

had given him many an earnest thought and prayer these intervening weeks.

It seemed curious to be sitting beside Leonard in this manner; unmoved, in a certain sense, so far as her personality was concerned. She was neither indignant nor regretful; nay, there was a sense of satisfied friendliness. She had dreaded a meeting so much and fortified herself with certain lines of what she considered justice. They were all swept away. She could think him greatly in the wrong, but she could not be angry; so much does time soften all our asperities.

Mrs. Fanshawe made a little general conversation. They could not dismiss the wonderful music and acting from their minds in a moment; it had moved them so deeply.

"I confess I shall never rest until I hear it all the way through," Leonard said. "In fact, one should hear the whole trilogy. Did you go to 'Lohengrin'?" he asked, with interest.

"We made ourselves almost ill over it," replied Lyndell. "Tessy sings some of the songs."

Tessy flushed and raised her eyes deprecatingly. How curiously sweet she was, affecting one's senses like a delicate perfume!

He handed her out last and walked up the steps with her. She paused a moment to say good-night, and seemed to vanish like a dainty sprite. He and Dell entered the reception room, where he explained the particulars of his errand. The ladies were to come up to Washington, and she was to meet them. The funeral would be on Saturday. Could she go in the train that left at eight?

Mr. Murray would fain have kept his guest all night,

but Leonard had his room at the hotel. And as it was late, he bade them adieu.

"You must go to bed at once," said Mrs. Fanshawe. "I will pack a satchel for you, and if you stay, your trunk can be sent to you. But we are all selfish enough to want you back."

Dell smiled gratefully and went to her room, pausing for a few last words with Tessy.

"You are not *very* angry with him, are you?" asked Tessy, in a pleading tone.

"Not half as angry as I expected to be. I am afraid I shall get to liking him too well again, forgive him too easily. I don't mean that the old idea can ever come back," and the scarlet flew up to her brow. "I can never play at love again; it is too sacred. But it seems very hard to be ill friends with anyone. Perhaps Leonard and I are doomed never to get on very well together."

"But you *will* be friends?"

"Oh, you teasing little darling! You are wanting a perpetual Christmastide: 'Peace on earth, good will to men.' You were always the peacemaker in our childhood. I will promise to do my best, for friendship's sake. There, good-night, or Mrs. Fanshawe will come and scold me."

But Lyndell could not go to sleep at once. She kept thinking over the past summer and autumn. She had not been lonely with the doctor and her dear Miss Neale, and Uncle Beaumanoir, who thoroughly understood her unfortunate episode with Leonard; and much as he had desired the fruition of his hopes, he knew it had not been Lyndell's time to love. Every day she grew more sacred to him.

Aunt Julia had insisted upon this visit to the Mur-

rays, when they heard Mrs. Fanshawe was with them as chaperon and companion.

Mr. Murray had gone abroad in the early summer with Con and Tessy. Democratic as Con was, he had developed a little race pride, and was satisfied when he found his father's people could go back to old Jacobin stock on the one side, and many native patriotic ancestors on the other. There certainly was nothing to be ashamed of. His father's only brother had gone out to India in the ranks, but was now captain of quite a famous company. Both sisters were dead.

"I'm glad they've all been clean, honorable people!" exclaimed Con. "I'm thankful there are no old skeletons to fly out of our closet doors when other people open them."

"We must see that we shut in none ourselves, my boy," his father made answer.

In London Miss Ashton had taken possession of them all with her genial hospitality. Con was going over to a German university for a year. Tessy was to return with some school friends in November, but Miss Ashton begged hard for a longer stay.

But it was Mrs. Murray who had met Mrs. Fanshawe, and there had been a mutual attraction when they began to talk of Dell Sherburne. And though Mrs. Murray knew very little of society demands, and was almost frightened to think of her husband as a rich man, and her children growing up under such different auspices, she longed for some friend or connection who would understand the proper usages. Mr. Murray's wide business experience, and the natural capacities that make nature's noblemen,—honor, uprightness, and the courtesy of a kindly heart,—

enabled him to thread his way through new paths with hardly a thought of discomfort. Tessy possessed the same rare quality. She had always been "a little lady."

Mrs. Fanshawe accepted the position as much because she was really won by Mrs. Murray as by the excellent offer. The Murrays were making no bid for an *entrée* into fashionable society, but Con's friends were enthusiastic about him and his surroundings, and Tessy had quite a circle of acquaintances. But she needed the indefinable protection of a chaperon.

Her letters had been a source of delight to Dell, who read them aloud. And when Tessy begged for a visit in which they might "talk over everything," Dell looked up wistfully to Aunt Jue.

"We must let her go," she said to Aunt Aurelia, with a little gentle decision. "Dr. Carew thinks Warren cannot possibly last through the winter. Such an incident would shadow Lyndell's memories of her home, and yet there seems no other place where Warren would feel so comfortable. He would shrink from any change. Then, too, the expense would be considerable. We shall not be able to have any Christmas festivities."

"No," assented Aunt Aurelia.

"Lyndell's youth will pass all too rapidly. She can never have quite such a time of exuberant delight. And the other girls seem so engrossed."

It was true. Violet had her lover, and Mrs. Longworth was inviting her to Washington gayeties. Alice was under her sister's wing, and allowed only the merest flying visits to see her father. Mrs. Lepage flitted back and forth, declaring herself so much needed at Ethel's.

"If I could do anything for Warren," she would say plaintively. "But Jasper is the best of nurses, and is needed to lift poor Warren. Gifford is at hand to read to him and talk. Somehow Gifford always knows what to say to his father. And I never was of the slightest account in a sick room. To sit and watch Warren day after day would drive me distracted. Someone must be in Washington to see about all the unfortunate business. Alice and Florence *do* need my oversight. I never thought I should have to go through such seas of trouble."

Aunt Aurelia used to listen with a curious wonder that anyone could be so blinded in herself. Perhaps she was the more gentle, thinking of her own mistakes. And they were much more at ease when Mrs. Lepage was away. Even her husband seemed relieved. But Aunt Aurelia had an old-fashioned ideal of wifely devotion that was quite shocked by this indifference.

Gifford was growing strangely dear to her. He and Dell found many simple pleasures. She laughingly gave him "a part of her dear doctor," who was a most comforting friend, and strengthened him to take up life in a true and earnest manner.

"If I could only blot out last year!" Gifford would sigh. "It haunts me."

"You cannot blot it out. That will only be done the last day. But you can gather so much good fruit on the other side that it will be quite overshadowed. You are not to look at it, save as a warning in times of temptation. And think of the comfort you have been to your father."

"I am glad he never knew the worst. And I shall be grateful to Dell to the latest day of my life. I owe my redemption to her."

Aunt Aurelia was very fond of having the young people about her. She consented reluctantly, but if Dell had known the real struggle she would have relinquished her desire at once.

Perhaps it would be wisest for her to go now. Aunt Aurelia appreciated the point Mrs. Stanwood made. Mrs. Fanshawe was there to watch over Dell, and that laughing, delightful, dangerous Con was out of the way.

And so Dell had gone for the holidays, and was surprised and gratified beyond measure.

"You are all so oddly changed," she said that first evening. "Even Mamma Murray is transformed into a society lady, and Tessy seems always to have lived on the topmost round of elegance!"

"Oh, no, no," laughed Mrs. Murray, with an unwonted pink in her cheeks. "I shall always be a simple body, wondering how people come to like me so well. For I can't pretend."

"That's the very charm. You have such a lovely heart, and you want everyone to be so happy. You give of your abundance, just as you used to give of the dear old home. And how people used to come and sit under the apple tree, and delight in the flowers you gave them, and the welcome! When you forget a moment and say 'alanna,' you are simply irresistible," the girl declared enthusiastically.

"But I'm trying not to, for the children's sake. It is as their father says: they are growing up in a different atmosphere. And we want them to fill their places just as naturally as we filled ours. I understand so many things, dear, and it has softened me so to Miss Sherburne and all that old time. Then Con found her so much nicer than he had any idea.

Alanna, I've thanked God many a time for his goodness in letting us all see the right way."

"And *she* has changed too. She is a lovely old lady. She will always be grand, she is so tall and stately; but I never feel afraid of her now. And she is really interested in that earlier life, only I can see she thinks it a great pity that I couldn't have come to them at first. But I wouldn't give up the remembrance of those happy years with you for all the sorrow that came afterward. Only," and Dell laughed, "are you quite sure you didn't persuade Oberon to bring you some of the juice of his magic flower and make changelings of us? For Tessy is the kind of girl Aunt Aurelia would have delighted in. A girl who can make lace and embroider, and do dozens of pretty things, and always look calm and sweet. I sometimes feel as if I had been the wild Irish girl."

"But you're very pretty and ladylike. And they say you do favor your father's people. I am glad of that. But your own mamma must have been a picture when she was well, with all that beautiful golden hair."

Dell might readily be forgiven her pride in her friends. They had never been of the vulgar or ostentatious sort, and now there was no pushing for place or station. Their simplicity was like high breeding.

Jamsie was a fine lad past sixteen, who had developed quite a remarkable genius for architecture, and had settled upon that as his profession. Morna was already as tall as Tessy, and lily fair with luxuriant golden hair. They grew so fast that, if it had not been for baby Densie, the little mother would have felt lost and bewildered.

Dell's Christmas was one of unalloyed gratification.

Mr. Whittingham sent her a generous allowance and a letter that brought tears to her eyes. She and Tessy haunted shops and picture stores. Miss Neale's poor had a Santa Claus dispensation showered upon them. The servants at Sherburne House, the friends she had made at the "quarters," reveled in the generosity of their young mistress, who seemed to know just what everyone wanted. And when it came to cousins and friends, she stood a little appalled at her own extravagance. "I know how *Prince Fortunatus* felt," she said with a long breath of delight, as she came to the end of her list. "I've had a glorious time, but I may never do quite the same thing again. I remember my Cousin Millicent saying that when gifts became obligatory the charm ceased. I don't want ever to feel that I am compelled to give, but to give for the pure love of it."

There was one little series of events that were not as satisfactory. This was with Anita Garcia. Her letters to Dell were queer compounds. At first she had cared for nothing but music and poetry and studying Italian. She had not seemed to long for the promised visit from Lyndell; and preferred to spend the holidays at school. Mrs. Weir's account was not unsatisfactory—on the whole; still she confessed that she scarcely understood her.

But the romance Dell had invested her with was sometimes rudely rent by a strain of what seemed like hardness in the girl's nature. She was content to stay, she practiced her music with the utmost perseverance; she accepted favors as merely business, when Dell would have been delighted with the slightest longing for affection. And yet she had loved Leonard with such perfect devotion!

There had been another rift of gratification through this time. This was the occasional calls of Bertram Carew, who appeared very much at home with the Murrys. He and Tessy had numerous consultations about invalids who seemed a little outside of the ordinary channel. Tessy had a curious discrimination and aptitude for this kind of work.

Christmas he had kept with his father, and brought back a budget of news from them all.

"I almost persuaded Millicent to come up and join you," he said, with an arch sort of smile. "I do suppose she would be dreadfully missed at home, but the sphere *is* too restricted for her, and she has some tender conscientiousness on the subject. She has such an exquisite, comprehensive soul. There must be a grand work for her. I don't know but my ideas of women's possibilities would startle Aunt Neale and father."

Was Millicent really his ideal? She felt almost guilty to have enjoyed so much with him, especially at operas, as if she might be taking what belonged to someone else.

She was a little pricked in her conscience about staying. But she wrote that if anybody missed or needed her she would return gladly. Millicent was filling her place. Her bright, chatty epistles were a great comfort to Gifford. How very happy she was!

"Yes," said Aunt Jue. "I want her to have some good times to look back upon. It is not always youth."

And as Lyndell lay there in the darkness she was shocked that someone she had known and really cared for should go out of life, while she was in the very center of delight. She could not have done anything

better for him, and there was Gifford's tender care and love. But it seemed sad that more of his children should not have solaced his last days with their affection. It was a fruitless life, after all. She could not feel quite satisfied with the ending. Indeed the whole of it seemed barren of results.

Was there not some greater sacredness about the gift of life than the getting of money and the restless strife for pleasure? Had Aunt Edith ever been really happy, she wondered.

Her slumbers were light and broken, and she responded to the rather early call. Mamma Murray, sweet and sympathetic, had a dainty breakfast for her.

The first mail brought her a letter from Aunt Julia, detailing the occurrences of the last few days, and the peaceful ending of what was only a partial life and held no hope of recovery; of Gifford's devotion and his grief. The funeral would be in Washington, and some arrangements would be made for her return.

The good-bys were brief and unfinished. They all hoped to see her soon again. Leonard was grave and solicitous for her comfort. The morning was cold and gray, and everybody seemed in much the same mood, to judge from their faces. But the drawing-room coach was warm, and the chair easy. Leonard brought her some papers, and settled himself to the morning news. There were not many passengers, and they had a corner quite to themselves. Dell looked out of the window at the cheerless landscape as they went flying along. It seemed to her that it would be less hard to die in winter.

She glanced furtively at her cousin. His face had taken on a more manly earnestness and strength.

Yes, he was very handsome, certainly. Bertram's could not compare with it, and yet she liked that the best.

"I hope you were not unduly alarmed last night," he began, in a kindly tone. "Aunt Julia requested me to come——" as if half in apology.

"I think a telegram would have startled me more. I had a letter from her this morning, in which she spoke of the arrangement."

He folded his paper and gave her a slow, deliberate glance that brought the warm blood to her face. Then he wheeled his chair around. No one was near. He could talk without fear of being observed.

"Lyndell," he began, "I suppose sometime we shall fall again into the habit of meeting; of being cousins, if not friends. I came up to New York a fortnight ago, and it seemed strange indeed to make no sign."

"I——" Would she have been glad to see him? No, she could not say that. Yet she was glad to have the ice of the long silence broken.

"There is something I must say to you——"

"We will be friends," she interrupted hurriedly.

"But even then something needs to be said."

She glanced up with a sort of frightened deprecation, and her lips moved as if to entreat his silence.

CHAPTER II.

WAS IT DUTY?

"I must be said," he began imperatively. "I shall have to admit that I was very angry when we parted. I intended to see you again, but second thoughts prevented. Perhaps it was quite as well. Six months ought to restore the equilibrium of one's mind. The friendship that grew up between us in that great crisis of my life should have brought forth better fruit. And it must not end this way."

"It has not really ended." Dell tried to steady her voice, which would tremble.

"I am glad to have you say that. When one goes over any episode dispassionately, months afterward, one may come to a sense of right and duty, however distasteful at first. I want your esteem. You are very dear to all of them at Beaumanoir. I am not willing to be the only exile."

His whole demeanor touched her. How had she withstood him that summer night?

"I resolved upon this step some time ago, but I felt I had no right to take it without consulting you."

There was an appeal in his hesitating tone. He resumed without waiting for an answer:

"I heard of your plans for Miss Garcia. Father and I had discussed something of the kind, trusting her to Dr. Carew's guardianship. Your offer was most generous."

"But I had so much, and she was so friendless——"

"I wonder"—rather annoyed—"if all your interest centers in her? Do you not care to know the result of my reconsideration?"

He was piqued by her quietude. She did not really understand it any better than he; but she seemed vaguely fortifying herself from some apprehended danger. Her affection for him still confused her. She had made a pleasant duty for herself in loving him, but with the rude awakening had come a recoil. Time had softened even that, she found. If he had besieged her with importunities she could have kept a firm front. Was she really wavering? How to give just the right measure on this new threshold puzzled her. For oh, she could not begin over again!

"Yes, I do," she made answer, summoning her courage, but not raising her eyes; setting her heart steadfastly.

"If I was to blame inadvertently, I have manliness enough to make amends. I have resolved to ask Miss Garcia to marry me."

"Oh, no, no;" she cried, roused to the utmost, for she had not suspected this. "Oh, do not!"

Was there some latent tenderness in her heart for him? What if she had loved him better than she knew? These months of silence had left her so completely to her own communings. She had all the incidents of their trip abroad to remember, and she could not forget what she had been to him in every sense. Her protest gave him a thrill of exultation.

"Why not?" he asked. "You have all blamed me for her share of the mistake."

"There are many reasons," she began hurriedly. "You must know—you must feel——" How should

she word it? "Oh, you do not love her," she cried, with sudden desperation.

He had gone over the case a good many times in a sort of legal way, making himself the client. He was much better prepared to argue than she.

"I *did* like her. She was a pretty, winsome child, with possibilities. Miss Fleming felt the same about her. It seemed a pity to have her remain there in her ignorance. And I can imagine how, if Miss Fleming had taken her, educated and trained her, and there had been no one else," raising his eyes in an appealing manner that brought a warm flush to Dell's face, "I might have gone on finding graces and charms in her until I was really in love. Many men have married in this way. But I *was* awakened to something higher."

Dell turned her eyes away. His whole air, his voice with the subtle entreaty, moved her more than she had thought possible.

"Believe it or not, Dell; I shouldn't have written to her when I was once away without a thought of consequences. But Miss Fleming's death, her lonely despair, and her letter, coming just as it did, roused me to sympathy. If I could have put the matter in Millicent's hands—I even think now I could have trusted mother to advise. And then she quieted down and we fell into a friendly fashion. I never wrote her love letters. They were about you all, and I know I said a great deal concerning you. After I had made up my mind about you, and before I ventured to speak, I wrote the letter she missed. I said in that my plan of life included a marriage with you. I want you to believe that I could not have deliberately wronged either of you."

Lydnell wondered if the sin of carelessness was not as bad for the one who suffered as the sin of deliberation.

"I might learn to love her. I might devote the side of my nature not required for business to making her happy. Is it an unworthy purpose?"

She ventured to turn her eyes toward him. Was he striving to convince himself? There was an indefinable manliness in every line; a certain new strength, beseeching and fascinating.

"Do you *want* to love her?" Dell inquired, with a quick, palpitant breath.

"I desire to do what is right. I want to regain your respect and friendship. Do you not think we give to people the measure and the quality they are capable of awakening in us? *David Copperfield* loved *Dora*. Anita would come up to a higher plane than *Dora*. And when a man is loved——"

Was she to be set over Anita as a kind of *Agnes*? Was Leonard willfully blinding himself with some specious sophistries?

"When I made this resolve I should have gone to her at once, but she seemed sacredly in your care. I felt I had no right until I had consulted you. Dell, you shall decide."

It was a cruel strait. For a moment she felt a hot indignation rising within her, and almost wished he had gone on his own responsibility. What if in the depths of her heart Anita still loved him? What if her bravery of contempt had been largely assumed, to give her courage? Dell had a suspicion that he could go to her and so sue, if he chose, that she would forgive the past. Did he mean to do it, or plead his cause in a perfunctory manner that would only pain Anita and insure a refusal?

What would be best for Anita?

"Oh, what can I say to you? Why not ask your father? You have him to think about as well. I am afraid nothing but the highest love could make amends. If you *do* love her in that manner——"

"I am not pretending to, now," he said impatiently. "We take up duties because they are right, and abide by the consequences. I hope I have honor enough to do my best, in whatever I undertook."

There was a long silence. Leonard twisted the corner of his paper, smoothed it out, and began to feel really nervous instead of heroic. It seemed as if she was holding the future of Anita Garcia in her hands, and they trembled with the burden. What if she shut her out of a great joy! For although Dell had written kindly, sisterly letters, Anita had not responded in sentiment. She chronicled her progress, her likes and dislikes; and there was a sort of dutiful, instead of loving strain. Was there, after all, no real breadth to her nature, no vital warmth? Leonard's wife should be someone who could be taken into the family circle and would respond to the touch of relationship. Anita could so easily hold herself aloof.

Leonard meant she should decide the matter. It was going to be his test. If her decision was in the negative, he would never again question it. Perhaps it would indicate a lingering fondness. They had been more to each other than ordinary cousins. And if it was otherwise—well, he would live up to it heroically. It would take two or three years to educate Anita, for he had no mind to have a sweet, ignorant wife.

There was a romantic side that appealed to him now, the generosity of youth. He was not taking it

up humbly, to see what lesson could be learned from his self-indulgent mistake. He must in some sense be a sort of hero to both girls, when their interests had been linked together. He had suffered bitterly last autumn, but it had been largely mortification and the sense of blundering. And though he knew he must go against family tradition if he took this step, it seemed to ennoble the sacrifice of himself.

It was such a sacred thing to meddle with a life, to make or mar. Dell Sherburne's good sense told her, just as Dr. Carew had, that Anita Garcia was not the wife for Leonard. Was he the husband for her? Somewhere Dell remembered to have read that mistakes were permitted for the needful discipline of living out of them. But if one did not go blindly into the wrong path? Every moment she was more convinced.

Unconsciously she raised her eyes. She did not know that she answered him. He kept the faintest throb under subjection.

"Am I to go?" he asked, with a lingering inflection.

"Not with my consent."

She felt breathless and frightened. Had she taken something sacred out of another life?

"If I have wronged anyone, do thou, O God, restore fourfold," she prayed softly.

They stopped at Philadelphia; some new passengers came in, and he called to a newsboy for another paper. Then they settled themselves to silence, since someone was sitting directly behind Lyndell.

Leonard Beaumanoir was not surprised. Her verdict had corresponded with his inmost belief. In spite of his high resolves he would have felt wronged in some mysterious manner, if she had consented. He

would have gone because he was not a coward, and because he wanted her approbation. Then he would have left the rest with fate.

His feelings were very complex toward his cousin. He had truly believed, six months ago, that she would be the greatest factor in his life. Yet he had worked steadily, faithfully, under the spur of chagrin; and now he was aware of a conscious power that was not love, but ambition. He had been an immense favorite with society this winter, and many lovely eyes had turned graciously to him. Was she really his ideal? She looked extremely picturesque last evening, and there was the other picture beside her with the dainty refinement in every line and feature, the indescribable sweetness that was not weak. How curious that Tessy Murray should so have won Aunt Aurelia in that first visit! Wouldn't Dell have her at Sherburne House again, next summer, maybe? How she had once threatened to have the whole clan there—he almost smiled to himself. Yet he liked Dell none the worse for her tempers, and surely none the worse for her fidelity.

If he had shown any special gratification at her decision, she would have been humbled beyond measure. But his very gentleness seemed to her as if he had sacrificed something. She felt it was not love for Anita Garcia.

The Sherburne House inmates, and the Beaumanoirs all but Violet, were at the hotel, and gave Dell a fond welcome. Little Nora had grown prettier, and suggested her father strongly. Dell could not help recalling the time when they had all gone to Millicent's betrothal party and seen Aunt Edith in the glory of her new house. How many misfortunes had come upon her!

"Are you quite sure you did not need me?" Dell asked Aunt Aurelia. "It seems almost wrong to have had such a delightful time."

"Oh, no, my dear! Uncle Warren did miss you at first, but his mind failed a good deal. Gifford was such a comfort to him, to us all. I don't know what we would have done without him. Your little good seed has borne abundant fruit."

Dell pressed the soft hand in hers. It was beginning to show the wrinkles of age. She was so glad to give back to Sherburne House any blessing or comfort.

"We all thought it best for you to be away. The burden was really ours, and it would have been selfish to lay it on you, when you had taken up others," Miss Sherburne said tenderly.

They went over in the early evening to call upon Ethel and Aunt Edith.

The house was very handsome, certainly, but its grandeur did not now awe Lyndell. The spacious hall seemed a bower of ferns and palms with one great cluster of calla lilies. Ethel came to receive them.

She was curiously changed. A tall, self-possessed society woman, with quite a regal bearing and impressive manner; much improved, Dell thought. She greeted them with a soft, subdued air; and her somber dress trailed about her, suggesting a picture of night rather than sorrow.

"It is so good of you to come! Mamma is quite ill in bed, now that the reaction has set in. We had heard such good accounts of papa that we had no thought but that he would live a few months longer. So it has been a great and sudden blow. Oh, Dell, what a stranger you are! I hope the sad summons did not interrupt too many of your New York pleasures.

When I think how happy we were four years ago Christmas, and all the changes since——”

Ethel put her handkerchief to her eyes.

Alice entered and came over to Dell. The black gown seemed to enhance her fairness, and made her look younger.

“I’m so glad to have you again,” and she clasped Dell’s hand with a tense, nervous pressure. “Wasn’t it terrible! We had no idea papa was in any real danger until the telegram came. And I had not seen him for so long. I ought to have been there all winter. I shall never forgive myself! Oh, Dell, do you think he missed us very much? I should have been glad to care for him, but mamma seemed to think so many were in the way. And there was a little talk of bringing him up to Washington. I am glad he had Gifford. But no one thought the end would come so soon.”

“He had every care,” suggested Dell, longing to comfort. Yet the lack of those for whom he had toiled was pathetic.

“But he should have had his own. And to think I have not seen him since in the autumn. There was always some reason; something going on, and I couldn’t be spared. As if *one* made any difference where there were so many people! And as if people really cared for you! Oh, Dell, I am tired of it all so soon! And to think of a life of it! I am afraid I wasn’t meant for a fashionable woman. We were so happy abroad.”

“You must come to Sherburne and get rested. You are all tired out. How you tremble! Or perhaps at Sherburne——”

“I want to go. Do you know, it seems as if we had

never cared enough for poor papa! Do you suppose he remarked it and felt lonely? I hoped we could have a simple little home. But everything seems so strange when you are in the whirl, and you must keep doing just as the others, whether you like it or not."

Gifford came around to them and put his hand softly on Dell's shoulder. Neither of them spoke until the others had risen to go.

"Dear Dell," he said, "I owe you so much. I sometimes wonder if life will be long enough to repay you."

She glanced up with tears and a smile.

Warren Lepage had been too well known and too much respected, even if he had slipped out of the ranks the last year, to lack any of the kindly tokens paid to the dead. The church was thronged with friends. The heavy purple pall draped the coffin, and the last words were said over him reverently:

"Looking for the general resurrection at the last day."

Afterward Gifford said to Dell: "I think he came to understand some things at the last. Aunt Aurelia helped. And I shall look to meet him at that last day, not quite empty-handed."

A very quiet Sunday followed, with its Christian bells sounding a benediction. Then they began to make plans for a return. Dell did not want to go back to New York. Gifford was quite ill and feverish.

"I'm sure I don't know what we are to do!" moaned Mrs. Lepage. "Warren's illness was a dreadful blow, and that he should never recover enough to take an interest in anything! And all the expenses since have been simply frightful." She did

not seem to consider the months at Sherburne House and the nursing, for which Aunt Aurelia would hear of no recompense. "Mr. Longworth has been doing his best, but it is simply a wreck. They are holding on to the Western lands, and sometime another railroad may bring them into the market. And there is Florence to educate, and Alice to settle, and Gif ought to be in business. What will become of us?"

"Come home with us for a while," proposed Aunt Aurelia sympathetically.

"You are very good, but I couldn't leave Ethel just now. The death came at such a bad time for her, poor girl! right in the midst of the season, as one may say, with everything planned. This very week there was to be a grand dinner to some Western Senators. And all Ethel's lovely wardrobe—two elegant Worth gowns, one of which she was to wear for the first time, and the other she only wore at the French Minister's dinner. She was magnificent. I wish you could have seen her! And Saturday she was to help receive at the White House. Mr. Longworth is so proud of her, and generosity itself. But we cannot all be a burden on him."

"You need not be a burden on anyone."

"But there are so many things—you can't understand all the minutiae, in your quiet country life. And we were looking forward to Alice's engagement. It would not have been a long one, either. It doesn't do for girls to fall out of the ranks nowadays. I didn't hurry them in the beginning, and if we could afford it, Alice might take her time, but we can't now. Oh, did you ever think I would be in this plight when Warren had been so prosperous!"

Aunt Aurelia sighed. What comfort could she give? The refuge she had sought would be ignored.

They waited to see how it would fare with Gifford. The doctor ordered quiet and rest. And after some insistence they took Alice and Gifford back to Sherburne House.

Ethel Longworth laid away her handsome gowns with many a sigh, and looked longingly at the list of engagements and invitations. The round of pleasures had absorbed her completely. She had been a great social success, and Alice had proved an attraction as well. The plans for her had not *quite* crystallized, but she would have been elated to have Alice marry in her first real season at home. Another month, she thought, would have brought about this desirable engagement.

To be sure they could go to Florida, but deep mourning was depressing, and one must conform to a decent seclusion. If the death had occurred a month later, when dissipation was on the wane! How hard it was! Of course no one had expected papa to recover; it had not even the shock of a sudden illness. And now the business misfortunes would have to be admitted, in the fact that there really was no estate to settle. Mrs. Lepage had a few thousands of her own.

"And there's Dell with that great fortune that Mr. Whittingham and your uncle keep tied up so closely, until she is of age. It doesn't seem as if she ought to have everything. I heard Leonard say they had leased the coal lands very advantageously, and they mean to open some new iron mines. She ought to marry Leonard, but Aunt Julia has some foolish notions about allowing her the widest latitude in her

fancies. And if she should take that Murray young man, I don't know what Aunt Aurelia would do."

"The Murray young man would take her away," returned Ethel, with a short laugh. "Aunt Aurelia would have the house to herself. But it does seem quite unnecessary for Lyndell to have *all* that money when she really cares so little about it. Perhaps she will remember her poorer cousins when she comes into possession of it. But she has so many wild ideas that I look to see her turn Sherburne House into a home or a hospital for the scum of the cities. That is getting to be the modern fad."

"She has begun with that queer girl the doctor picked up last summer. She might make quite a decent nurse girl, with some training. Aunt Aurelia has failed very much since her accident, and Julia really doesn't know how to manage girls. She has been with men and boys all her life."

Mrs. Lepage sighed. When she envied Lyndell she quite forgot that not a penny of her own father's share had gone to Edward Sherburne's child.

Leonard was quite satisfied with Dell's cordiality at parting, and promised to join the cousins as soon as he could get away from some important business.

Miss Sherburne felt greatly relieved to be at home once more. Society had no compensations for age.

"It seems as if I had been away six months instead of two!" Dell declared as she flew from room to room with some of her old eagerness. There was an inspiring touch in her delight and satisfaction.

Aunt Julia feared there might be some lurking shadows of sorrow about the place. But Dell's happy voice would have sent them trooping. She was glad

with a great thankfulness that Uncle Lepage had come to this quiet, roomy old house where there were plenty of servants to wait upon him, and where no one fretted. It added a curious sacredness to the place in her estimation.

Dell supposed Aunt Lepage loved him as much as she could love anyone. Her own pleasure was first to herself. And that awful, restless desire to be in the midst of gayety and fashion, to have her clothes and her jewels, yes, and her children admired for their beauty or their style or their power of attraction! And when one was done with it all—when the days came, as had happened to Uncle Lepage, when one said: "I have no pleasure in them"! What if the same thing should happen to Aunt Edith?

Dell shivered at that, and secretly hoped Sherburne House would not be her refuge.

All traces of the invalid had been removed—even the wheeled chair had been put away. There came a sudden springlike warmth in the atmosphere, and Dr. Carew insisted on Gifford being out of doors as much as possible.

Alice clung to Dell in a curious manner. She seemed haunted by some influence. Dell thought it a kind of self-condemnation. She wanted to talk about her father continually.

"He was unconsciously heroic, toiling for us all. What he must have lived through that year we were abroad! There must have been so many discouraging, solitary hours! And that no one made it up to him in all this long illness! I did try a little last summer. Dell, did you ever seem to be talking a strange language to someone, knowing they could not understand, and yet you would not talk in their

tongue? And now one can never say a word. It is too late."

Dell wanted to comfort, but what could she say? The thought had entered her mind more than once. The consolation was that Uncle Lepage had not wanted for anything.

"He had grown so accustomed to Gifford that I think he would not have enjoyed anyone else as well," Lyndell said gently.

"It is not just now, it is all the years. And more especially since he fell ill. It seems as if we should have had a home together, and near his old friends. But Aunt Jue has been so lovely! Oh, Dell, what can a girl do to grow into that kindly, generous sort of womanhood? One must feel better to one's self."

"It is—thinking of others—in the little things," and Dell colored warmly, with a strange hesitation. "Aunt Julia gives up a great deal. I feel sometimes as if I ought to take her place, being a daughter of the house, and let her have the freedom of her own life, to travel about with Uncle Stanwood."

"Dell, I wish we could undertake it together. I am so tired already of that old life. And now that we are to be really poor——"

She glanced up so wistfully her listener was moved.

"Oh, if you could!" Dell's soft eyes were radiant. "We might be like real sisters. I don't suppose Ethel wants you—needs you," checking herself. "She is happy, is she not? Mr. Longworth seems very proud of her."

"Ethel is—— Dell, what do you suppose makes us so indifferent? We ought to be intensely sympathetic. But we are not at all alike. Sometimes I have thought I must be at fault. She has been so

generous with me all winter. The only thing I could do to gratify her was to shine, and I shone." There was a half smile on her lips, more pathetic than the tears in her eyes. "But all the time it seemed such a vain, useless shining, just to attract the moths of society. I wish I had a genius for painting, even as much as Ethel has, and Mr. Amory thinks she might do some very good work. And I haven't the courage to be a strong-minded woman."

"You are just going to be comfortable for a while, and get over all your nervousness," said Dell cheerfully, drawing her to her heart and kissing her. "You are all tired out. I wonder why we make such hard work of pleasure, for after all pleasure is delightful, and should be one of the great sources of enjoyment."

CHAPTER III.

GATHERING FRAGMENTS.

SPRING was abloom everywhere. The whole air grew full of that mysterious wood melody—the chatter of birds, the rustling branches, the hum of bees—that was strident and ambitious, and had not yet been touched with the drowsiness of summer afternoons. The girls stood on the porch in the jasmine-scented air, wondering which direction they should take for a morning excursion.

Someone was coming slowly on horseback. Dell flushed; it was her cousin Leonard. She had not grown used to meeting him tranquilly, she found, yet she could give no good reason for the disquiet.

“You two girls are to be envied above all people,” he cried, with a wave of the hand. “Sherburne House is the Garden of Eden, or the Land of Beulah, or the Enchanting Country. If there are any more names of delight, they all belong to it. And you can dwell in this serene and beguiling atmosphere without a care——”

“Oh, has anything happened?” exclaimed Alice.

“No, my dear cousin,” dismounting with a light spring. He kissed Alice, and Dell felt that a protest would seem silly. Yet she had meant to hold herself distant.

“I came down last night. We, rather, for Amory came with me. I saw the folks an hour before I

started, and they were debating the important matter — 'Where we shall go this summer.' If I could come to Sherburne House I would ask no odds of fate or Europe. There is not much romance about business, but being a junior member I must stay and delve, while my seniors take their ease. Pity me a little."

Dell flushed still deeper under the glance. She could almost have shaken herself for the old friendly feeling.

"Where is Gifford? And is he well enough to be allowed to leave this seductive abode?"

"He is up in Aunt Aurelia's room, looking over some business matters for her."

"Don't disturb him, then. I have all day before me. But my chief errand is to him."

Leonard threw himself down on the step with a dainty *insouciance*. A scarlet tanager clove the sunshine and, settling himself on a branch, gave vent to a short, sharp little song, as if he had for a moment escaped family cares.

"Yes, it is simply delicious," and he drew a long breath. "Dell, I was in New York last week. I went up to the Murrays', to see if they were inconsolable for your defection. Mr. Murray was going for a drive in the Park and insisted that I should have my call in the carriage, with Tessy and Mrs. Fanshawe."

Dell glanced up with a look that was almost grateful, glad that he did not disdain her friends.

"Mr. Murray is a very fine business man," he went on. "A gentleman by instinct. Oh, Dell, do you remember that old episode about Frasier Walden? I just wish she could meet Miss Murray somewhere. The dignity of that quaint little body would astound her. She is beautiful; do you not think so?"

"Why, I believe we always thought Tessy pretty. But Morna will outshine her. She grows tall, like her father, and has a peerless complexion. And an air!" Dell smiled. "She will be able to carry off the honors of a queen."

"There is something very charming about Miss Murray, though. I'm not sure but girls ought to be small," laughingly.

"She is like her mother, with the intangible difference that training makes." The young girl was beginning to understand.

"Then I don't wonder you were in love with Mrs. Murray. Dell, I shall always honor you for your courage and fidelity." His voice dropped a little and went instinctively to her heart. "We are beginning to outgrow narrow prejudices."

"Everybody connected with Dell seems to be charming," said Alice. "Yet I do feel glad the Murrays are rich as well; though money alone, with the vulgarity pride in it brings, is simply detestable."

"We haven't been brought up to consider money the great thing, although we cannot deny that it is a very *good* thing," declared Leonard. "But it seems to make very little difference in these modern times if a man has money, how he gets it. I confess I would rather come by it honorably."

"I don't believe Mr. Murray would ever do a mean or dishonorable thing," said Dell emphatically.

Gifford and Aunt Aurelia came downstairs at this moment; and the lady gave him a cordial welcome. He looked so strong and handsome sitting there in the sunshine that her whole heart went out to him. He was like the son of her old age, and she still coveted him.

"I have come to break up your pleasant trio," he began, taking Gifford's hand. "I heard of a very good temporary position yesterday morning, and I went to your mother, Gif. She begged me to come down at once. And if you feel able you had better go back with me to-night."

"I am quite well again and shall be glad to begin at anything. You are very kind," the young fellow made answer.

"I promised to look out for you, old chap. And by autumn I hope there will be something that promises advancement. This is in the nature of a private secretaryship, though it is mostly copying matters for the press. The young man is to be sent to Europe on some important business, and his place is to be filled for two months or so."

"You think I am capable——" Gifford hesitated.

Leonard laughed, with a soft kind of gayety that was encouraging rather than satirical.

"As I remember, you were a very handsome penman. And the family take to correct spelling naturally, though even that is going out of fashion."

"Correct spelling!" exclaimed Aunt Aurelia, aghast. "I didn't know there was any fashion to circumscribe so important a necessity."

"A fad, then! Oh, Aunt Aurelia, fashionable society will soon relegate us to a back seat," and he put his arm over her shoulder caressingly. "The virtues we acquired with our early education will become a source of amusement. We shall be considered aborigines shortly. I sometimes think I must have a private secretary to decipher my own letters for me. So, Gifford, you need not worry."

A deep flush had suffused his rather pale face as

Leonard spoke of his penmanship. It had been considered fine, and he had the dangerous gift of imitation that had already brought him into such peril. Was he to consider a chance word a reminder?

"The morning is too glorious to waste," declared Leonard. "Especially, when you do not have many such mornings at liberty. Can't we all take a good gallop somewhere?"

Dell's eyes sparkled. Alice glanced up timidly. "Ought I?" she asked.

"My dear cousin, we are a law to ourselves out in these wilds. We shall meet no one who will comment on us, and it would be a sin to miss such a splendid opportunity. You girls, go and get ready. Where is Julius?"

There was something in the young man's manner that touched Aunt Aurelia. That natural assumption of authority, that curious little air of feeling perfectly at home that would or ought to distinguish the owner of this grand old place. If matters only had gone on smoothly!

"Yes, do go, girls!" she said. "And it will do you good, Gifford. There will be plenty of time afterward to get ready."

She stood there alone when Leonard came back from ordering the horses. The light wind had blown some stray ends of hair over his forehead, his eyes were deep and eager, his coloring superb. She was very, very fond of him.

"I am glad you and Lyndell are friends again," she said softly.

He gave a short, joyous laugh. "If you give Dell time, she generally comes around to the right side. But, Aunt Aurelia, I can't help thinking a magnificent

boy was spoiled in Dell. What a pity she is not a son of the house, and that the Sherburnes are not to go on here under the old name. She has a courage and honesty that goes toward making a manly character, that women do not need to so great an extent. Their truthfulness ought to be allied to tenderness, sweetness."

"I hoped she *was* growing more womanly," and the elder lady sighed.

"There is a new type of woman coming to the fore, and Dell unconsciously has some of her convictions, and the courage to carry them out. I like her, and would trust my very soul in her hands—nay, more, I shall always love her. Yet I am not sure we are the two people best suited to one another."

"Oh, Leonard! that old fancy!" she gasped, turning pale. "Surely you have relinquished it!"

"Dear Aunt Aurelia, Dell decided it. I did want her approval. I was not such a mean fellow as to deliberately wrong anyone. I meant, when the heat and indignation of the matter were over, to discuss it with her. She has learned a good deal of the real opinions that govern the world. She is well connected herself, and it does unconsciously influence a person. Besides, she loves my father dearly; and I knew she would hesitate at giving him a lifelong discomfort. She took just the view of it that I thought she would. And now my conscience is clear, and we are the best of friends."

"But if some romantic notion had swayed her! Oh, Leonard! it was a great risk," and Aunt Aurelia shivered.

"Still, I feel better to have met it boldly." He held

his head proudly, with a sense of conscious rectitude. The girls were coming through the hall in their riding habits. He bent and kissed the cheek where the lines of age were making tracery.

It was true, though Leonard Beaumanoir had not been as rigorous with himself as some less self-conscious person. He had gone over the ground judicially; not with sympathy or any real remorse, only the wish that he had been wiser. Dell could judge from her own past experience how hard it would be for a person of unknown antecedents to make any headway with the household. Millicent would always have a gentle reservation. The real family harmony would be destroyed, and Dell would be in some degree answerable for it.

Whether he would have gone through this course of reasoning if he had been in love with Anita Garcia, is very doubtful. Whether he would have placed implicit reliance on Dell's judgment, if she and Dr. Carew had openly espoused a marriage, was questionable also. But it was over and he was very happy, and relieved with a consciousness of well-done duty. He was not one to raise up old ghosts of the past. He could live happily in the present.

They had an exhilarating gallop with much bright, youthful chatter. They stopped at Beaumanoir and brought Violet, Milly, and Mr. Amory home with them, on condition that by mid-afternoon all the party would return with the whole household.

Dell managed to find a few moments with Gifford. It had been an engrossing and almost merry day. Dell had made an effort to inspirit Gifford, for she knew how he shrank from going out in the world again after his months of seclusion.

He spoke of this. He shrank from facing the active duties of life.

"But it will be so different," she said, in a tone of encouragement. "Then," smilingly, "you will be almost as much secluded, and quite among strangers. It will not be like the companionship in New York."

"And I ought to be strong after these weeks of resolve, of endeavor. But I shrink away from a word that brings back the past. It grows blacker to me," he said gloomily.

"Then you have no real trust in God, nor in yourself. Yet his grace is sufficient."

"I *am* afraid to trust myself. I may count on too much strength, and be deceived."

"Are you quite sure that is not weakness? God has promised with the temptation that comes to us to provide a means of escape, to provide strength. So long as we do not willfully seek out temptation we can rely on his word, surely."

"You do not think I would seek out temptation again?" Gifford's face seemed quivering with terror.

"No, I have a firm trust in your resolve. Can you not trust God, then? When we cry for strength and assistance against weakness, God does not lift us bodily over the dangerous places, but shows us the better way. Why, you remember there were steps in the Slough of Despond, and yet the pilgrims could not see them at first."

"And there will be no one to talk to, to take comfort with. Aunt Jue has been so good, a tower of strength." Yet his voice sank piteously.

"But you must believe for yourself," Lyndell said. "You must exert the power within your own soul, within your own body as well. It seems to me I

would try to believe that I couldn't be drawn into any wrong thing again."

"'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed,' " quoted Gifford, with a half smile.

"But he is expected to *stand*, after all. And to take heed lest he fall; not to sit down lest he fall."

"I used to make resolves in that old time," he said despondently. "And I kept sinking deeper until I came to you."

"But now you are going to keep them," she replied, with a resolution in her tone that inspirited him. "You are going to take heed every hour, every moment when there is danger. But you will not conjure up theoretical dangers, and wonder how you can pass through them safely."

Gifford was silent a moment or two. Then the grave face relaxed into a smile.

"Dell, I do believe that is just what I have been doing this last week or two. What a foolish fellow to borrow trouble in that fashion! Yes, I *will* do my best and wait for the lions to come out. They may be chained and able to go only so far. My dear cousin, I wonder if you will ever know what you have been to me, what you have been to all of us!"

The quick tears made the brown eyes lustrous.

"I am glad if I have been of ever such a little help. It is such a blessed thing to have you all love me, to belong here."

"But I shall owe you more than any of the others. I can never hope to repay it all."

He took both hands in a solemn clasp.

She wished in her generosity she could say, "The debt between us is forgiven. You begin again, free from any obligation." But Uncle Beaumanoir had

strictly forbidden it, and she could trust him to have a care for Gifford's welfare.

"Give me a chance for a last, long, lingering farewell," and Leonard came toward them. "Dell, I have had a splendid day! I seem to have lived ages in it. I shall take back with me the visions of boyhood, and the ineffable loveliness of 'the spot where I was born.' When I have gained honors and a judgeship and middle life, I shall come back here to end my days."

"Not at middle life, I hope!" laughed Dell.

"I don't believe I could face death as courageously as three years ago. No, I hope to have a good long life. Have you picked up all your traps, Gif? Then make the round of good-bys, for we must be off."

Uncle Beaumanoir managed that the leave-taking should be rather cheerful. He was going over to Ardmore with the young men. Mr. Amory was to spend a week or so. They tried to persuade Alice to stay, but she preferred to return to Sherburne House with Dell and the elders.

Dell seemed in a very happy frame of mind. Miss Sherburne watched her in a questioning mood. As she had said, she was gratified to have peace restored between the cousins—nay, more, this friendly intimacy. She wanted Leonard to feel free to come to Sherburne House. She could not quite believe her hopes had come to naught. It is so hard to give up a matter that looks wisest and best to us when all surrounding circumstances appear to promise fruition.

Another year would make Dell mistress of herself and Sherburne House. Any marriage but with Leonard would change the atmosphere greatly. Yet she was trying to do justice to the very uttermost

where Dell was concerned. Little by little her share in Gifford's unhappy episode had been revealed, and one evening, when they had grown tenderly confidential, he had confessed the wretched story, even to the debt.

"I must see your uncle and have this paid at once," she said decisively. "Why, he could have settled it himself. I do not understand it!"

Her tone sharpened, for her dignity was wounded. That any member of the family should be thus indebted stung her to the quick.

"Dear Aunt Aurelia, please let it stand. Like the prodigal, I said I would go to her. And I mean to pay every dollar. Oh, it would seem like snatching the credit out of her hands! The shame of it would almost have killed you then. Everybody was trying to be careful of you. And Uncle Beaumanoir had done so much for father."

Yes, she had felt the consideration for a long while. And though she had at first rebelled and protested against weakness, she had resigned herself graciously to her lot. She could never stand so austere alone again.

She was too delicate to seem aware of Dell's share in the rehabilitation of either of these cousins, though she could not quite dismiss a secret mortification. But the girl's sweet unconsciousness went far toward soothing it. Dell arrogated to herself no superior wisdom; no touch of importance was manifest. She was unfeignedly glad to be at peace with everybody.

But did Leonard mean she was so different from most girls that he had really ceased to care for her as he had heretofore? Was the world of womanhood changing?

The girls sat out on the porch together in the soft darkness of evening. She could hear their voices. Dell's had an unconscious firmness, perhaps, but it had been trained to a sweet, attractive sound. They were talking of the lovers.

"It isn't a bit like Milly's engagement," said Alice. "They seem like bees, taking the sweet everywhere. He was always finding excuses for her to stay in Washington, and if she came home he was sure to follow. He has painted some fine portraits, and he really was one of the events of the season. Did you see the Madonna?"

"Not the real picture, the photograph. Tessy Murray was wild about it. I wanted to give it to her for Christmas, and I was at my wit's end to make excuses that would keep her from buying it. The straits were positively amusing," and she laughed.

"It has a suggestion of Millicent—the indescribable look that came in her face in those early days after the accident. He will not sell the picture, nor paint a copy for anyone, although he has been offered an extravagant price. He allowed it to go to a loan exhibition, but he rarely shows it to visitors at the studio. He begins pictures of Violet and then rubs them out. There is only the one little portrait at Beaumanoir."

"I suppose he loves her so well that nothing comes up to his ideal," returned Dell, with a soft little laugh.

"They were looked upon as quite idyllic lovers, and yet they were never silly. Violet was greatly admired. She could have chosen over half a dozen times. And I am sure there were ever so many who envied her. To be loved like that——"

Some longing in her cousin's voice touched Dell.

Alice was leaning her face on her hand, and her head drooped with a wistful sort of poise, as if there was a vague imagined rest that would have been grateful. The lamp had been lighted within, and a delicate shadow enfolded her.

"I suppose we all dream of love——" Dell checked herself; it seemed such a foolish thing to say.

"And rarely find it. But some few have the exquisite satisfaction." Alice's sentence ended with a sigh.

A disturbed thought came to Dell and somehow shaped itself unwillingly—the winter at Naples, and Amory's admiration of Alice, the idealized picture he had painted of her. They had been such friends. Was it probable? A girl like Anita Garcia might give her heart ignorantly, but Alice——

There Dell's face flushed with sudden scarlet. It was possible for a girl to see the combination of qualities that attracted her—nay, there was a certain subtle something that could not be put in words. It was deeper than a fancy, it did not clothe itself in a hope. It was a rare contingency, yet it might pass one and go to another.

Had it passed Alice?

Dell experienced an infinite, tender pity. She longed to draw her to her heart, to utter some whisper of sympathy, yet she felt quite helpless. This would be the bitterness with which a stranger meddled not.

"Girls," said the inspiring voice of Aunt Julia, "are you out here bemoaning your loneliness? It really seemed like old times to-day. And I dare say you are tired enough to go to bed."

"Yes," answered Alice, rising, "I have exhausted

all my wit and grown stupid. So I think I will say good-night."

"But it is early," protested Dell.

"Still I long to take counsel of my pillow," and Alice went to bid Aunt Aurelia a bedtime greeting. But she soon followed. Aunt Julia and Dell had a talk about Gifford.

"I am very glad this came to him. The poor boy wants rousing, and it is not natural for a young fellow to keep so secluded."

"Aunt Julia, you *can* trust him!" Dell cried imploringly, as if she must settle the elder woman's faith.

"The lesson is too bitter, I think, to be repeated. Then he will never be in quite the same temptation again. He must work straight on."

"Are they going to be very poor?"

"Well, Gifford must take care of himself. You see, if he had studied and graduated, he would have taken some position or gone on with a profession. However, nothing can be changed, and he did make his poor father very happy. I don't know what Warren would have done without him. But, my dear, Aunt Aurelia won't see anyone come to want. She is taking the expense of Florence upon herself. Ethel and her mother agree very well so far, and in a house like that two or three women are needed for the requirements of society. Then we shall all be good to Alice."

There was something heartsome in Aunt Julia's tone and manner; very affectionate, too, as she placed her arm caressingly over Dell's shoulder.

"We must adopt her," said the girl. "I want a sister; and surely I have enough for two or three."

"I wish we might keep her."

The wish was rudely dispelled, however, twenty-four hours later. Julius came up with the evening mail. Aunt Aurelia handed the key to Dell. The old habits of the house scarcely changed.

"I dare say it is all for you young people," and she smiled a little.

"One for Aunt Julia, one for you, Alice, and two for me, beside the papers. That's Tessy's. She doesn't write the big fashionable hand. And from California—Lady Ashton, of course."

Alice opened her letter reluctantly. It was not very long. But her countenance lost its glow.

"Gifford is all right, I suppose?" said the elder lady rather nervously.

"Oh"—Alice started suddenly—"mamma doesn't say a word! I suppose she had not seen him yet. Ethel is not well, and they are going to take a sea voyage—to Old Point Comfort, Charleston, and Savannah. And they want me. I must go up to them. Oh, I wonder why they do! I would so much rather stay here and be quiet."

Dell was looking over Tessy's letter. She wrote such a pretty, finished hand it was almost like reading print. And there was a page about Leonard's call.

Dell laughed to herself. "I suppose Tess thought she must confess every word he said. As if it mattered to me!"

"What is it?" suddenly recalling Alice's remark. "We cannot let you go. Ethel will have your mother to care for her."

"It isn't as if we were on a society tramp. We might be excused a little while. I might at least."

"A society tramp!" said Dell, amused. "I thought the fashionable world was resting after its campaign."

"They never do rest." Alice uttered this pettishly. "Before we stopped everybody was planning late spring and summer entertainments. Ethel wanted a cottage at Newport."

"I am afraid you were not meant for a fashionable woman," said Aunt Julia.

"Oh, I am not, surely! Though I do like pleasure and meeting people when they are—what shall I say—companionable, entertaining. When they have something new to say."

"But Solomon declared there wasn't anything new," said Aunt Julia, with an amused expression.

"Perhaps there isn't—much. But, Aunt Jue, many of the things are nice, if you could follow them to any conclusion. When one just gets interested in a chance remark, or a person who has had some bright or unusual experience, or has real ideas about a play or a book, you must leave this and go to the next comer, and repeat the old things about the day and the weather and somebody's reception, and the dinner at the M.'s or the Y.'s. When you have said it over a hundred times it is tiresome. I want a nice long rest. I wish I could begin to make some use of my poverty. But I don't know what I can do," she added helplessly.

"I almost envied you last autumn," said Dell softly. "Yet I had a very happy winter. Tessy Murray has some delightful friends. And I found so many interests. I didn't do half the things I wished to, though. But about this matter—I want you here. Can't you write to Aunt Edith——"

Alice took up her letter again. "There is no reprieve. Someone is to put me in the train to-morrow morning. They start on Saturday. Mamma

has ordered a new gown, and everything is planned. Events always do seem planned for me. It would be nice to start up and do something of your own volition."

"You shall do it to-day!" declared Dell. "Whatever you desire shall be brought to pass; unless you cry for the moon, which you can't have in the day-time."

"I have learned the wisdom of not desiring impossible things. Now, if I could only be content with the possible ones!"

Dell flushed with a mysterious consciousness, as if she knew what the impossible thing might be. How bright she had been with Paul Amory yesterday! She was too pure and high-minded to desire what could not be hers, yet how could one help missing it?

She stooped and kissed her in warmest sympathy.

CHAPTER IV.

BETWEEN.

“A LITTLE space in which to live my own life,” Dell Sherburne said. Millicent, Violet, and Mr. Amory were making a brief visit to some cousins on the Beaumanoir side. Alice had rejoined her mother. Aunt Aurelia had been expressing a fear that she would find it lonely after so much companionship.

The elder woman smiled. “You seem very happy in other people’s lives,” she said. “But I hope you will have something of your very own. There is time enough for it,” as if she would not hurry the future.

Dell flushed a little. “I was thinking of the friends near by. I don’t want to neglect them. Mrs. Kirby has asked for a few days. And I have just run in and out of Dr. Carew’s. Mollie Mason is home with her baby and besieges me for a day in which to study his perfections. And Aunt Jue and I are to take the boys over to Strawberry Creek on Saturday. Why, I couldn’t get lonesome if I tried.”

She was very bright and happy in these days. The world was wide and beautiful. Why could she not make Alice see this? Even now she was troubled about her cousin’s depression, fearing almost for the future. She could not divine where Mr. Amory had been at fault. In that old time at Naples he had treated them all alike, but he had deferred rather more to Violet.

If it was her mistake, she surely ought to summon strength to live above it. But no one could touch the sore spot with any finger of healing. "We can't always cease to care for people, any more than we can make ourselves care for them," she ruminated sagely to herself. All this had come from a most uncomfortable letter from the young girl. Gifford was going on well and found his new employment agreeable. Everything seemed to open out on the sunny side.

Aunt Aurelia sat with some fine sewing in her hands. She liked to think she was busy, and felt less nervous when she knew she could be employed at any second she chose. Dell was on the step, leaning her round chin on both hands, and letting her eyes rove about at their sweet will. She saw so many pictures of delight.

"I suppose you will be busy——"

"Not so busy but that I can take up anything for you," she made answer. "Shall we have a drive?"

"It wasn't just that, though if you like to take me over to the doctor's—I have a little errand with Miss Neale. But you might wish to ask someone in this lull, or is your own life to be quite by yourself?"

Aunt Aurelia's smile had a little mirth in it. She never said satirical things to Dell nowadays, and Dell understood.

"No, I couldn't live quite by myself." She laughed softly. "I don't even enjoy a walk alone, and in a drive, if there is no one, I talk to Bonny. I couldn't be a nun and enjoy religion, in a convent cell."

"It is a good thing to keep a wide outlook." Then, after a pause, she added quite irrelevantly: "Aunt Jue and I were thinking you might like to ask

some friends of your own. Sherburne House is at its most beautiful now."

Dell was silent from a mood of surprised consciousness. Then she laughed faintly. "Why, Aunt Aurelia, it seems funny to think of, but I haven't any friends besides the Murrys. I haven't kept up with a single schoolmate. I suppose it was going abroad. And there have been so many cousins I have not felt the need. *Did* you mean Tessy? How delightful in you to think of it!" For the assent was plain in Aunt Aurelia's face.

"You do not seem to make many young friends. Aunt Julia was speaking of it. My dear, we want you to feel at liberty to invite anyone you like very much to stay at Sherburne House. Not exactly those in the neighborhood—they are free to come at any time as their mothers did before them. We meant to have matters quite different on your birthday. But we could not plan for anything like pleasure."

"I am glad you thought of me, however." She came and laid her hand on Aunt Aurelia's shoulder. "And I am doubly thankful that Uncle Lepage had such a lovely place for his declining days. Then I have had so many pleasures in my life."

Did she count her joys double? Miss Sherburne remembered many things that could not have been pleasures. She had tried to restore; but there was so little she could give or do now. Yet Dell's grateful joy for that little was exquisite.

Aunt Julia had started the idea, it was true. And though it was rather awkward, she felt it was not only her prerogative to suggest it, but her duty.

"I would write at once," she said gently. "People will be making summer arrangements soon."

Then she sighed so softly Dell did not hear it as she kissed her. Was the old home feeling dying out?

When Dell had written this glad, insistent epistle she thought of another that was troubling her conscience. She must take some counsel. Last summer the way had seemed clear to her—had she put a stumbling block in it with her own hand.

Then she started for town. But she had just turned into the avenue when she met Dr. Carew.

"I was coming to scold you," he said. "Jealousy isn't confined to any age. Sometimes old people are the worst. But I warn you I am not to be crowded out. I shall stick to my place. Why can't you give me an hour now and then?"

"I have neglected you shamefully! But I was coming over. Aunt Aurelia and I."

Dell glanced up with such a laughing yet tender light in her eyes that his frown, never very deep settled, disappeared.

"Come," he said, "send Bonny back, and give me the morning. I have no very sick people on my hands. Even if it is a shopping expedition I will take you in to Ardmore."

"Gallantry can go no farther," returned Dell laughingly. "There is Uncle Pete—he will take Bonny back and a message."

Dell changed to the doctor's buggy. It had been newly painted and looked quite fine.

"I heard everybody had gone away. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Answering my back correspondence and listening to Cassy's sage advice upon gowns that want touches here and there. At first, you know, there were Gifford and Alice——"

He nodded with a far-off look in his eyes.

"And now we are quite settled. Alice was very loath to go. She is tired out, and she feels badly about her father."

"The end was inevitable. He lived longer than I thought possible. It was Gifford's care and the quiet. And now I hope the young man is started on the right road. The winter did a good deal for him, as well. And your dissipation in New York doesn't seem to have worn you out."

He looked at the shining eyes and the clear skin, the scarlet lips that held a summer-like sweetness.

"We didn't dissipate very hard. There was some splendid music. I'm converted to Wagner. And some famous people came and read their own stories; some poets, and read their poems. And pictures without end. A winter in New York is a liberal education."

"And my boy—you saw him?"

The doctor pretended to be engrossed with a fly who was considering the tenderest, choicest morsel of his horse, but he noted the bright flush that came down to her ear and sent a delicate shade to her very neck.

"Yes, we saw him. Oh, you can't think what a friend he is of Tessy Murray's! She goes about doing missionary work for him. There are so many poor—there is such bitter, biting poverty!"

"And you couldn't drive them out of the cities. They despise country places," he declared shortly.

"And Tessy may come, I have just sent for her. Aunt Aurelia proposed it. Oh, Dr. Carew! you can't imagine how lovely it is to be at peace with all——"

"All women?" interjected the doctor in the pause.

"Miss Lyndell, I am quite in love with your great aunt, Miss Sherburne. It is well this didn't happen in my marrying days. My dear child, no one rejoices more than I," he added, with sudden emotion. "Looking at the other world and the laying down of life, naturally softens one. There was her long illness. And there was the endeavor of a little girl——"

"Oh, Dr. Carew, it was such a weak, halting endeavor. And I was—yes, I *was* obstinate and self-willed, and must have tried her to the uttermost. I wish I had been different. I wish even now I was different. I don't know that I *could* fill a large place, but I often seem to myself to be lopping off something not really wrong, to enable me to go through other people's doors. Or is it conceit?"

He laughed heartily. "Some doors *are* narrow," he made answer. Would she ever quite fit in Sherburne House? What if a wider world opened before her? Would she be able to go out into it with their blessing?

He drove lazily along. It was such a perfect day, with growth and bloom in riotous profusion, and a flawless sky. They lapsed into silence. One charm about her was the delightful repose. Perhaps the repression of earlier years had its use. Nature's divine book lay open before her, and every leaf, every vista of golden-tipped shade, the squirrels darting in and out, the bursts of melody, touched her with reverent delight. Every line of her face was informed with a soul depth that bespoke unfolding possibilities. It had changed greatly from the child's face. It was stronger than her father's; not as handsome, yet it had many of the Sherburne indications.

Even while he watched, the tranquillity was a trifle

disturbed by some passing thought. He was fond of watching faces when they held enough to repay his study.

"Well?" he inquired presently, when it had settled to a touch of perplexity.

She turned and smiled faintly.

"I ought not to have a care or anxiety since it is smooth sailing with me; since everybody has seemed to overlive their hurts and wounds. And this isn't"—what should she say to exonerate the others—"this is a burden of my own making."

"Oh, are you still at the business?" with a dry, humorous smile.

"I am afraid I shall be at it all my life long," she answered gravely. "I remember you once proposed burying them all as the farmers did vegetables, and you said the poor ones would shrivel up and end themselves. But this comes up plump and sound. And I must do something with it."

A soft color wavered over her face.

His eyes questioned her. Was Leonard concerned in it, he wondered.

"It is about—Anita Garcia."

"And isn't everything satisfactory?"

"It is what to do next!" she exclaimed impetuously. "I don't know who could advise me best. Perhaps I was hasty and self-willed about it last year. I have been learning a great many things about myself, and sometimes I seem to have no mind at all."

But she had had mind and decision enough in that journey from New York.

"Has the girl disappointed you?"

"Yes, she has." Dell's face was suffused with a curious emotion akin to shame.

"Then she has not come up to your wishes for her. She is not as capable as you imagined."

"Oh, it is not that. There seems no question now but that she has a beautiful, promising voice. Mrs. Weir believes that she will be a great success. Her teachers have said so, and there is no reason why she shouldn't go on."

"Well, what then?"

"I am selfishly disappointed. I wanted her to care about me. Her letters are so precise, so unsympathetic that they would amuse one. She is my debtor until such time as she can repay me, and she will work night and day to do it. At first she was indifferent to everything but music. Now she is very ambitious and learns with the utmost rapidity. Mrs. Weir is greatly interested in her. It is considered best for her to keep on another year."

"Then why should you feel so anxious?"

"I have not seen her at all in all this time. I went straight through to New York in the winter. I asked her to come up to us for the holidays. The Murrays were anxious to see her. Of course I did not tell the whole story."

"There was no need. It would not have been just to all parties. There was nothing absolutely reprehensible on her part, but sins of ignorance are sometimes as severely punished as sins of intent. We seldom take God's large, clear sight. And she did not want to come?" he added.

"That was exactly it. She made some excuses about the music; oratorios, I think it was, that were to be given. Then I spoke of visiting her. She gave me a decided impression that she was *not* anxious about it. She holds herself so aloof. She is so

different from what I hoped. Yet she seems very, very grateful."

"And the next year is about decided upon?"

"Mrs. Weir advises it. Anita wishes it. I am quite sure it will be wisest."

"Then your trouble is about the vacation time? She does not want to come here?"

"I am sure she does not."

"I think it much the best. I respect her for it."

"Yet we all admitted she was not at fault," Dell said, with a sense of disappointment at his approval. She could see it was best herself, yet she was not quite ready to have another put it into forcible words.

"Would you rather she were willing to come?"

"I don't know. I'd like her to want to see me. I think my *amour propre* is hurt," and Dell smiled faintly.

"You want to reap the reward of your good work too soon. My dear, there are people who wait years. There are people who never get it at all, but have it laid up in the world beyond."

"Was I over-hasty?"

"I suppose the matter couldn't have come about unless God had permitted. I still think he sent a work for you to do, and you could do it better than any of us." Did he send a lesson and an experience with it? "It takes an infinite deal of patience to disentangle the crossed threads of life," he resumed, after a pause. "Youth seldom does it. We learn later on what God meant, and often find our early translation of his dealings very faulty indeed. But we never start perfect in the beginning. There would be nothing for us to learn. The matter has worked no real harm anywhere that I can see."

He was trying in these days to be very just and not

hurry any meaning God might have in store. Even he, with his years and experience, longed sometimes to move the minute hand of events on the dial of Providence.

"I wonder if you would say the same thing now as you did then, that they are better apart?" she asked timidly.

"I certainly should." Then he laughed softly, "Dell," he said, half amused, "when you come to know the world better, and the men therein, you will feel assured that Leonard told the truth when he said he had never really loved Miss Garcia. If he had repented even, he would have gone to her. But I cannot think she would have accepted him."

"Suppose," began Dell tremulously, her pulses all athrob with the deep import the question had for her, "suppose he had asked you—or his father—to decide whether he owed her any reparation! I wonder what either of you would have said."

"I should have advised him to let her quite alone. This is one of the cases where the past ought to bury its dead. Surely, Dell, you are not romantic enough to wish to play peacemaker between them?"

"Oh, no!" she cried hastily. A great burden was lifted off her soul.

"I think Leonard has overlived the mortification. And, my dear, I am truly sorry for you. But it is only such a little while, and she was, I felt last summer, a peculiar combination of truth and ignorance and unreason. Do not force her to anything. Give her a choice of what she desires to do this summer, since she will remain at school another year. If you cannot help in her mental development, do not hurt or hinder. Time is nature's great healer."

"I wonder what I should do without you?" Dell said, slipping her hand into the doctor's. "One can confess to you so easily. Much as I love Aunt Jue and depend on her counsel, I didn't know how to talk this matter over with her. I suppose I was ashamed to confess to her that Anita had not responded to my regard. I believe I *do* love her. I feel sore and hurt about it."

"I do not imagine it is ingratitude. There are so many contradictory emotions in the human heart. Anyhow, you will have the comfort of knowing that you helped her over a rough place, and set her feet in a large room. I think you can trust her to go on. Are there any more troubles?"

"No," returned Dell, with soft, shining eyes. "I am only afraid of being too happy and too idle. I am twenty years old, Dr. Carew. I ought to be doing something for the good of the world at large."

"That is a very tempting and confusing idea. The world at large is an aggregation of the little world beside us. And doing for 'the least of these,' is the great commendation. It is the little steps that take one up higher.

" ' We reach not heaven at a single bound,
But build the ladder by which we rise.' "

Dell smiled a little. Then she thought of another life. Yet Bertram Carew had said not long ago, with the utmost enthusiasm: "I shall be content to leave behind me as good a record as that of my father." It would be wider; yes, it would be grander. Yet what a delight he took in the simple things of life. Why could she not be content?

There was a delightful dinner with Miss Neale,

whose hair was being threaded with silver, and whose soft complexion began to lose its firmness. And, curiously enough, she was anxious to know how Anita Garcia prospered. She was not quite certain the life of a public singer would be the one for her.

"But her one gift is this beautiful voice; a remarkable voice, they all think. If it was any other genius she would be expected to use it."

"But such a child!" said Miss Neale.

"We are all growing older," laughed Dell. "And, though she came from Florida, she may not have bathed in the fountain of eternal youth. Several years must elapse before she can face an audience."

Miss Neale was unconvinced of the propriety of the step. Yet she had nothing better to propose.

"I hope she will not prove ungrateful to you," she rejoined as sternly as her soft voice would permit.

They went into town in the afternoon and made some calls on old friends, Mrs. Kirby being among the number. How prim and old-fashioned the house looked! Yet Dell could recall the lovely visit of her childhood, and how happy she had been. Here was the old library where she and Spenser had traveled in imagination that happy evening. Mrs. Kirby begged for a visit of several days. Mr. Whittingham was anxious to see her.

Could she ever fall into these quiet ways? A strange enthusiasm kept stirring her up at odd moments. She wanted her life to be some kind of success; the vague dreams of early girlhood came over her with a vivid longing. There were women in the larger world taking a hand in great works, helping, organizing, sustaining charities and homes and training girls to usefulness. She did not belong to

the past generation. She felt it in her glowing vitality, in her energy, in all her desires—if she could not formulate them distinctly.

'There was a sphere, but she tried not to see it, or to look at it, with another life, taking up its blessedness. It might be years, for the man's plans were so full of eager sympathy, of high desires for the best in science and experience and learning of all kinds. She was glad that the slight mental disturbance could be put off a while; she was not quite ready to take it up and rejoice in it, as she must for Millicent's sake. And Milly had always been beloved by the doctor and Miss Neale.

CHAPTER V.

OUT OF HER LOYALTY.

IT looked at Sherburne House as if there might be a gathering of the clans. The Carricks had proposed a visit. Miss Maria had been an invalid all winter and was longing for a change. They were to stop a while with some Sherburnes in Richmond, and then would go on to Baltimore.

"Why not have a sort of family gathering to meet them? All elderly people?" explained Aunt Jue. "They are never able to travel around much in winter, and now everything is at its best, before the heat of summer sets in."

"Why, yes," said Aunt Aurelia slowly, as if she must have time to take in all the plan. And the older people would pass away presently.

"The young folks can have a good time at any season, so we do not need to consider them," subjoined Aunt Julia. "And Dell will have Tessy to keep her in countenance."

And so they had come, and there was much neighborhood visiting as well. Miss Carrick had not seen Dell since the long ago Christmas, though both sisters had visited Sherburne House while she was abroad. She was surprised at the tall, fine-looking girl, who might have been called handsome, away from Millicent and Violet.

Miss Maria was extremely thin now and waxen

pale. She still wore her hair in the old fashion, with the two drooping curls behind one ear; but she was very feeble, and her quaint sprigged lawn seemed to add to the delicacy. Miss Eliza hovered about her in a careful, motherly way. The twelve years' difference in their ages had given her that right. And though she did not seem very robust, she really was more brisk than Aunt Aurelia. Then there was a Mrs. Sherburne—a stout, cheerful body, seventy or thereabout—and her daughter, nearing fifty. The rest of her children had married and gone away. One son had been killed in the war; one had gone out to California, to seek a new fortune on the Western coast. Then some Floyds, and two Baltimore cousins who had come to take the Carricks home with them.

It was a picture of a world about which Dell had known nothing. Their quaint dressing and formal little touches that had been drilled into them nearly half a century before were so different from modern life, just as their ideas and beliefs seemed to have a by-gone stamp. Yet there was something nice and delicate; a high grace of courtesy with one another, a clinging scent of rose leaves and lavender; there seemed a pervading sense of rest and refreshing.

The season, too, was at the very height of beauty—bloom everywhere; the great clustering vine leaves tossing it out lavishly, a breath of the divine unsmothered life, not freighted with the crush and burden of cities.

One of the phases that interested Dell strangely was Tessy's peculiar adaptiveness. She was so at home with these quaint, other-world people who were always going over their own youth, and often their mothers' memories of customs and events. They cared so little

about the world's progress; indeed they knew nothing about it, except to dread innovations. Yet Tessy seemed as much at home as in the stir and bustle of New York, and the societies for the advancement of everybody.

Miss Aurelia had been won in that early visit by her subtle grace. She seemed to infuse an element of rare harmony in the atmosphere; she was so interested, so sympathetic, yet never insincere; she listened and threw in bits of talk that brightened what the others said, that gave it a real and pertinent meaning.

"You put them all at their best," Dell declared. "I don't see how you do it." She could be at her best with some people, not all. But Tessy seemed always at her best.

With all her lessons Dell had not yet learned the art of bringing out what was admirable in others. But at twenty most of us have not gone very far, except those rare souls with a special inheritance.

Miss Aurelia was well satisfied that these relatives should meet Miss Murray, since, indeed, the Murrays had proved to be people it was not necessary to ignore. All these incidents went far toward neutralizing the early mistake that she and Mrs. Lepage had been largely answerable for. Even the strain of Irish blood proved no detriment, since the Carricks were proud enough of theirs, more than two centuries old. It seemed a bond between them and Tessy. Miss Maria, indeed, quite laid claim to her.

"Oh, there are Aunt Beaumanoir and Cecil!" cried Dell, springing down the path to meet them. "And—you didn't walk, surely? Where are Millicent and Baby Nora?"

"No, uncle brought us most of the way. He is

going into town and will bring out Floyd and Winnie. I was to tell Aunt Jue. I left Milly with Dr. Bertram, who came about midnight, it seems, and they have some business together. He must go back to-night. Miss Neale is coming to tea. She drove Bertram over an hour or two ago, and then was going to the Moores. Gilbert, it appears, must go to the Adirondacks."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dell; "is he worse?"

"Not exactly worse, but not getting better. Bertram and his father were there in the morning. There, I believe I have distributed my budget of news. Am I not a good gossip?" And she smiled down into Dell's face.

A bright color flushed it. A touch of curiosity as well.

"You look like a picnic," said Aunt Laura, crossing the wide porch and laying aside her bonnet. "But how industrious you all are!" laughing pleasantly.

"We are old-fashioned enough for that," returned Cousin Sherburne. "It makes me nervous to sit idle. And mother is always knitting."

Cecil came to Dell and put one arm about her waist. He was growing a very manly little lad.

She listened to the child's talk and answered, but she was thinking of Bertram's sudden and unannounced visit. Surely it was not all on young Moore's account. And yesterday morning no one had known of his coming.

Yet she had set this truth before herself, and why should any feeling rise up in protest? If they two had come to a later consciousness; if he had stood aside when he knew the gift was not for him; why should she be envious of this new awakening?

"I will not be," she said to herself. But had not another mood come over Millicent? She kept very much to herself, she was either busy or preoccupied—growing away from her again.

Dell entertained Cecil until the other children came, and then they had a merry time. Presently Miss Neale made her appearance, but the others lingered until almost supper time.

Bertram came with his fresh, strong personality that was like a breath from the mountains, and in an instant they all seemed stirred from the gentle meander of the social stream. Miss Neale was very proud of him, as they all could see. And Dr. Carew had been a fixture so long that they all knew him and his life history, and took a certain pride in his son.

Millicent kissed Dell first, since with the group of children she had just turned the corner of the porch, and almost ran into her arms.

"I meant to be here a good hour ago, but there was so much to do." Then she checked herself suddenly, and a bright color went up to the edge of her hair. "I hope we haven't delayed supper."

"Oh, no!" answered Dell, in confusion. Then she stooped to Nora and lifted her in her arms, while Millicent went to greet the others.

Shortly afterward they were all summoned to the dining room. Uncle Beaumanoir had the foot of the table, with two young people on either side, and then the row of elders going up to Aunt Aurelia, while the three boys were delighted to have Nora with them, and Cassy to wait upon them. But the vital interest seemed to center in Bertram. That Dr. Carew's son should be out with the great men of the world, names they had heard of in connection with books

and systems and wonderful work for humanity, astonished them. And to have him sitting here, bringing out the best social points and explaining away their gentle fears of the world going on too fast and getting tangled up with theories—as if most of the facts of to-day had not been theories of yesterday, sifted and winnowed and brought to the strong search-light of truth!

“I do wonder what keeps father,” he said, as they went back to the porch and the wide-spreading lawn. “He is to drive me to the station.”

“Must you go?” Aunt Neale said pleadingly; and Aunt Aurelia wondered gently at his brief stay.

“It was just a little flying visit on some business I couldn’t well write about.” Millicent was sitting on the step below Dell, who caught the warm flush as it flashed over her face. “And I am due to-morrow noon, to see what can be done for a poor fellow. This isn’t any real vacation, but just a delightful glimpse of you all. And, Aunt Aurelia, I ought to thank you for the pleasure of meeting some old friends. Sherburne House has been famous for good times.”

He came around presently to Tessy Murray’s vicinity. “I have ever so many messages for you,” he began. “You have been greatly missed, I assure you. And so many people are going away now, that all the willing hands and large hearts count. Every year the work increases.”

“Dell,” said Millicent presently—rousing an unwilling listener, who with a sense of half-bitter sweetness was thinking how these two people worked together—“Dell, I had a letter from Germany this morning. Countess Sophie has a fine little son, born at Lucken-

walde and christened Waldemar. So the question of the heir is settled, and I suppose Countess Sophie is the happiest of women. And Baron Zahn is engaged, to the utmost satisfaction of his godfather."

She reached up a little and took Dell's hand. There was no answering pressure.

"Dell, dear, you do not regret——"

For a moment Lyndell Sherburne recalled the enthusiastic love that had been urged upon her acceptance. But no, she did not want to be in that faraway home, lovely as it was, with no friends of her own.

"Oh, no, not that!" and a little shiver ran over her. "I am glad it is so. Baron Zahn deserved to be happy, and it really was his duty to meet his grandfather's wishes in every possible manner. Yes, Countess Sophie must be very proud and content."

There was Tessy's soft voice purling through it all. Miss Maria was sitting beside them, so they could not be exchanging confidences exactly. She did not want to hear, and yet the very sound gave her a sort of nervous annoyance. Neither did she want to talk to Millicent.

"Hallo!" cried a cheerful voice. "Beaumanoir, are you secretary of this woman's convention? I've been listening to the doings of one in Washington, and have a queer feeling that we shall have to make a stand or be swept away. I *was* almost swept away. I began to think I should never get away in any other fashion. Have you persuaded Bertram that he loves Cæsar more?"

Bertram rose with a sweet, hearty laugh. "For all that I must leave Rome and emulate another famous hero," he began, taking a few steps forward. "We have not a great deal of spare time, have we?"

"Oh, enough, enough! I'm sorry I couldn't come to tea," turning to Miss Aurelia. "Still, I think my sex was well represented in ability, if not in numbers. Neale, will you take your chance with us—two great fellows as we are?"

"We will see about Miss Neale's getting home," said Mr. Beaumanoir.

There was the rather pleasant confusion of good wishes with the good-bys. He turned back to say to Tessy: "You will write about it." Dell rose and stood on one side—did he miss her accidentally, so far as a clasp of the hand went? He looked over Millicent's shoulder to say good-by, but a little group went down the path, Dell among them. Bertram sprang up lightly and waved his hand, and the wheels crunched on the drive.

The others came back to their talk. Dell busied herself with the children again. Nora climbed up in her mother's lap and went to sleep. The young moon was hurrying along her path, it seemed, drifting into cool blue hollows and then shining out again. The glitter had gone from the west, and a grayish softness came in its stead. Had something gone out of her life and left touches of gray?

The elders were talking about Bertram. Why did she not wish to hear him praised to-night, with Millicent sitting there, her face upraised a little and with an indescribable, satisfying light in it, as if she was dreaming of a blessed future, so rich, so complete that it shut out other visions?

Yes, she would be happy again. Two splendid loves to come into one life! Was the other buried out of sight? Would it be forgotten? A strange overwhelming protest came up in Dell's heart.

She had vaguely suspected before, but to-day there had been an assurance given. Something important called him down, surely. He was bright and cheerful, and Millicent happy. She had been vouchsafed a glimpse of unwitting confidence; was it a fine, strong friendship only? And she said, wounded in the tenderest spot, the friendship could be no real comfort.

Some of the guests went away a day or two later. The Carricks were having such an enjoyable time, and poor pale Miss Maria seemed to brighten up; indeed, she confessed to Tessy that she felt almost like getting well.

"If *we* had some young people!" with pathetic regret in her voice. "Cousin Aurelia has always been so fortunate. One and another stays at Sherburne House, and the children come and go. But we are all alone. And what Eliza will do when——" The tears came to her eyes. "We all like youth and sunniness," she went on tremulously, as Tessy smoothed the soft, thin hair, that had no need of crimping pins to make it wave, and kissed the still softer cheek. "And I wish we could have taken someone years ago—a child whose father was killed in the war, perhaps, and whose mother died of grief. I wish we had thought of it in time."

"There are so many little ones being sent to institutions," Tessy said softly, "that would be so glad of a home and mother love, friend love; for perhaps one couldn't quite give mother love."

"But if they gave the best they had, and if it filled the loneliness?" She glanced wistfully into the girl's eyes. "It is too late to think of it now. Only, if I should not be here—some time, and poor Eliza alone——"

"God will not let her remain quite alone, I am sure," said the tender voice, with comfort in it.

"I am so glad to have this little visit with you," the elder rejoined after a while. "You come so near to one's heart, my dear. You have a rare gift."

Tessy was thinking afterward that if she were Dell and Aunt Aurelia—she smiled a little, since she certainly could not be two people—she would ask Miss Eliza to come and stay at Sherburne House when the time of loneliness overwhelmed her. And she wished Miss Maria could see their household with all the merry, jolly children. How *could* anyone live alone!

Then Leonard came down for a few days. He brought encouraging accounts from Gifford. Violet returned, lovelier than ever, it seemed, and quite decided upon a marriage in the autumn.

"We shall go abroad for a year or so," she said to Dell. "Milly will be at home, and Nora seems like another baby growing up in the household. They can spare me, and Paul is becoming impatient. Oh, have you heard from Alice? Aunt Lepage wrote to mamma and suggested that Alice was—well, about engaged, making a very good marriage. I do wonder who it can be? Has Alice indicated any *penchant* to you?"

"No," returned Dell, rather startled.

"You have been such friends. Alice is very, very fond of you. She is absolutely smitten with your courage and resolution. She isn't much like Ethel, but I wish she could stand up for herself a little more. There were two or three men last winter—one was as old as Mr. Longworth, but not as refined and gentlemanly. Then there was a young fellow, a Mr. Phillips. I think he was very much in love with her, and he has no end of money, I believe."

"And was she——" Dell paused. She did not need to ask the question; she knew very well Alice had not even a vagrant fancy for him.

"He is a silly fellow, not worse than some other society young men. I am beginning to dislike men with no aims and no resources. And it was whispered about that he was not quite steady. But part of his fortune is tied up in some way so that he can't run through it. Then there was a fine fellow, someone's secretary, who had been connected with a Western paper, and wrote no end of very bright sketches. He was quite a favorite with Mr. Longworth. But I think Alice evaded the real offers. I wish she was going to be very, very happy."

There was a depth in Violet's eyes that attested her happiness. Dell sighed.

"I suppose we wish all the girls a splendid lover," and Violet laughed out of a full heart.

She would never know she had taken the happiness of another. Yet if it came honestly to her? How could she take what was not designed for her? And Dell remembered that Violet had once refused Paul Amory from the highest motives a conscientious woman could have. Yes, she had a right to her own happiness, surely.

"What are you studying over?" asked Violet, with a sense of amusement. "The whole weight of asking and answering seems on your shoulders. I do not think Alice would make a mercenary marriage. I can't really say that Ethel's is. Mr. Longworth has the highest respect and admiration for her, and Ethel is really proud of him, fond of him. But the position and wealth are great factors to her. She really couldn't be happy without them. And Alice would

like nothing better than coming down here to live among us all. I suppose she is what is called a thoroughly domestic girl."

"I only wish she would come!" cried Dell earnestly.

"Papa told Aunt Edith and Alice that nothing would give him more satisfaction than for them to feel that Beaumanoir would always be a home to them. Do you know, Dell, that papa is a very noble and large-hearted man? I suppose children are deficient in appreciation, while they overrun with admiration. Maybe it is because I have been thinking more of these things, that I see the fine qualities in him."

"He was good and tender to me the first night I saw him," and the quick tears came into Dell's brown eyes.

"And we were such heathens!" Violet flushed in a perfect shame of scarlet. "But that has gone by, and we all love you. And, Dell, you were quite right about Leonard. I am beginning to think it would take a great deal of grace to love Leonard, year in and year out. He is splendid, and there is no question but that he will make his mark. I am so glad for papa's sake. And Ned is getting over some of his uncomfortable ways, and is ambitious to distinguish himself. But Leonard has a kind of imperiousness that wouldn't suit all women. I don't really believe it would suit you," and she gave a furtive little laugh.

"No, it wouldn't!" exclaimed Dell emphatically.

"I hope he will get just the right kind of wife. Not one of those silly, adoring creatures, either. A girl something like Alice, for instance; well, perhaps a *little* stronger, but gentle and disarming and thoroughly good. Oh, dear, what a selfish lot we are! We want everyone belonging to us to be saved from all the

mental, moral, and physical ills of life. After all, if everyone even prayed that way, and *tried*, a good many might be saved. Is that narrow and heterodox, or merely sophistical?" and Violet laughed gayly.

"Why, if we could each save *one* person, the whole world would be saved." But Dell looked puzzled.

"We may get astray," returned Violet dubiously. "There are all the heathen. But I was going to say, ever so far back there, that mamma had written for Alice to come and spend the summer with us, and take some journeys—whatever we decided upon. I am glad papa didn't say it would afford him a great deal of *happiness* to take in Aunt Edith. She is a very uncomfortable person. Oh, I wish they had not lost their fortune."

Dell gave a little gentle sigh.

"Lyndell!" called a voice from the hall below; a clear, rich, authoritative voice.

"Well?"

"Are you going back to Sherburne? If so, I will drive over with you. I must go and make a morning call on Aunt Aurelia."

"Yes," answered Dell, for she felt she ought to have been at home an hour ago. She had left Tessy learning a peculiar and beautiful lace stitch from Aunt Aurelia, and she did not want to seem neglectful. She would a little rather not have driven alone with Leonard, but these events must occur in their cousinly life, and she had resolved to give them no especial signification.

He was a very delightful companion. There were many qualities that did command admiration. What if, after all, women had made second-best answer for their lives?

Not in love, her soul protested.

Leonard was in no lover-like mood. She need not have struggled against fancied danger. And as they drove up a pretty picture was outlined against the background of greenery.

Aunt Aurelia was bending the least trifle over Tessy, and her slim white fingers were pointing out or guiding the smaller ones; Tessy's face had a serene intentness, a sweetness quite indescribable.

Leonard checked Bonny an instant.

"What a picture!" he said softly. "It ought to be photographed. Aunt Aurelia is lovely at this moment. What a pity you can't have people at their best! Paul should see it. Why, it is almost as fine as reading Homer. How very pretty Tessy Murray is! She's a sort of Wordsworth girl:

" ' Her eyes are like the twilight fair,
Like twilight, too, her dusky hair.' "

Aunt Aurelia glanced up, and after an instant smiled as she nodded.

"We were talking about you," said the young man. "At least *I* was, and Dell listened without an objection. The receiver is as bad as the thief. A clear case of scandal."

"Did you scandalize us very much?" inquired Tessy, lifting her soft, sweet eyes.

"You cannot compel a witness to criminate himself. What sort of a conspiracy were you and Aunt Aurelia hatching?"

Tessy colored, and the creamy skin was like the ripe side of a peach. Then she held up her small hoop.

"We are making lace," she said. "You can fancy it is about the twelfth century. Here are the lady and

her maidens—all but one imaginary. And the donjon keep——” Raising the long dark lashes for a glimpse.

“And the pilgrim coming home from the wars. I haven’t any palmer’s staff. Neither am I in rags. But, Aunt Aurelia, if you will give me some luncheon or dinner——”

“We are old-fashioned enough to have dinner.”

Leonard threw himself into an easy-chair by her side, with his inimitable ease.

“Then we can go on with the play,” he continued, with a touch of gayety. “Maiden, allow me to inspect your work. If it is not satisfactory, you shall be relegated to some lonely cell.”

“You have nothing to do with it,” said Aunt Aurelia, smiling over at the handsome face alight with mirth. “You are no judge of lace.”

“Well, this is very curious—beautiful, I suppose, only you can hardly tell by such a little bit, Miss Murray. I think I will order a dozen yards on trust. Can you make a yard a day?”

“A yard?” said Tessy aghast, but her eyes shining in merriment. “This is the kind of lace that is worth a duke’s ransom. It would bankrupt you to pay for a dozen yards.”

“Alas!” in a tragic manner.

“And gentlemen no longer wear lace frills.”

“But I could give it to the lady of my love. What a pity velvet coats and lace ruffles and all the picturesqueness of dress have gone out of fashion!”

“My grandfather had one for full dress,” said Aunt Aurelia. “He would never give it up. And a flowered satin waistcoat, silk stockings, and great shoe buckles. I have his snuffbox and the buckles. There was a great deal of dignity in those days.”

Her face fell into rather severe lines.

“And now we take some of this grandeur for bicycling suits, or an occasional masquerade. I suppose I can’t order the lace, then! I am not willing to be bankrupted, for, look you, I have just begun my fortune. I wonder if the handsome women who have worn such a profusion of it this winter have bankrupted anybody!”

“It is so beautiful!” said Tessy softly, as if she could excuse the extravagance.

Dell lingered upstairs. Cassy was altering some of the gowns, and explaining to Philly what must be ripped and sewed again. When she had tried on two of them the dinner bell rang.

Aunt Aurelia was in a most agreeable mood. They lingered over their meal, chatting and laughing. Tessy said gay little things that were akin to wit, but were so sweet and sunny and full of good nature that she made Aunt Aurelia seem brilliant. Indeed, though Miss Sherburne could not have explained it, and certainly would have resented it had anyone told her, she did bring out some of her best things for the girl whom she had despised only a few years ago. Just as on that first visit, the rare old china and silver had been allowed for the sake of her interest in it. Leonard looked on with a little wonder. In what lay the subtle charm? How did she conquer by no apparent effort? They sauntered through the wide hall, where the wind wandered in great fragrant sweeps.

“Now I am going to dismiss you,” he began. “I know Aunt Aurelia always takes a rest, and you girls had better follow so good an example. Isn’t there something about beauty sleep? Afterward we will all

go over to Beaumanoir, and you can take supper with me."

Aunt Aurelia made a little demur.

"Remember my brief holiday, and take pity on me. You have always spoiled me, you know; and now, like the tyrant that I am, I must have my way."

He put his arm over her shoulder, and turning her face, kissed her with a smile. Yes, she had helped to spoil him, and he was very dear to her now.

"I shall have a book and the hammock. *Addio!*" with a wave of the hand.

Swinging slowly there in the shade of the trees, with the old house set like a picture in the midst of it all, he needed no book, but resigned himself to the old day dream. Could Lyndell Sherburne ever have the affection, the passion for this old place that he had? She liked it and was proud of it, but the ancestral love had not been born in her, ingrained in every fiber. No position or place, no ambition or fortune, could ever bring him such a perfect satisfaction. How many of his boyhood remembrances clustered around it! He could see the old pictures of busy pleasantness, of joy and amusement: his grandfather, whose favorite he had always been; the old slaves so proud of him, so ready to run at his beck.

It was a great thing lost out of his life, and somehow to-day it came back with a longing, hungering sense that nothing else could quite satisfy. Not so much the lost love as the lost home. In shame and humiliation he confessed that to himself. In a certain way he had come to love Lyndell dearly, he always should; but he had wondered of late whether he would have been so resolved to marry her if she had not been the heiress of Sherburne House. She was not the

ideal wife he had imagined. Perhaps he would never meet her. Perhaps—he had grown in so many directions, changed so many foolish opinions—his ideal might change as well.

Dell was worthy of a nobler love, of a better, grander type of man. Were there any men left like his father, like Dr. Carew? Could he bring himself up to finer heights for her sake? Would it be worth while to try on a less selfish foundation and win her over again, love her for herself alone and put Sherburne House utterly aside? It seemed at supreme moments as if he might do this. And then came a grave question that had crossed his mind vividly more than once: would she love him in the highest, truest sense?

She had loved him from a mistaken view of heroic duty, and he had loved her because Sherburne House was dear to him.

CHAPTER VI.

“AND YE SALL WALK IN SILK ATTIRE.”

MRS. LONGWORTH joined a quiet party in which there were some savants and literary people going to Spain, and expecting to take in the opposite shore of the Mediterranean. She was quite too correct to join the votaries of fashion or pleasure in her mourning robes, and there were several in the party who would prove desirable acquaintances afterward. Mrs. Longworth meant to be something beyond a mere arbiter of fashion.

Mrs. Lepage would remain in Washington until Florence's term at the convent ended, and then come down to Beaumanoir. Sherburne House would be too full of gloomy recollections, she wrote to her sister. But Alice came, rather against her mother's wishes.

“Do try to stay at Beaumanoir,” Mrs. Lepage said fretfully. “You get so gloomy and morbid with Aunt Aurelia. And Dell is full of fads and whims and poor folks and utter nonsense!”

But Dell came over the next morning after her arrival and carried her off, much to her satisfaction.

They two were quite alone with Bonny. They could take their time before the sun turned the air into liquid gold, while the branches overhead were all a soft, shadowy green, and the warmth had not absorbed the fragrance of the air.

"We need not hurry," said Lyndell. "Aunt Julia has returned, and Tessy Murray is devoted to Aunt Aurelia. Not in any effusive manner; indeed, I don't know just what it is, but Tessy's gentle pleasantness seems to fit in everywhere. I shall be so sorry to have her go. If it was anyone else I should be jealous, sometimes. I find out every day how far I am from angelhood."

"I've wanted you so much!" and Alice fairly gripped her cousin's hand, so intense was the pressure.

"Have you? I wish you had not gone away. It has been so cheerful, with all the going back and forth. Except Milly, who keeps herself in a strange sort of seclusion, but when she does come out of her shell she is more charming than ever. I have had the loveliest time." Yes, it *had* been lovely, for she had not brooded over that deeper life underlying the daily good, and reaching out for what could not be?

The tears trembled in Alice's eyes, and then she looked to the far-off bit of blue between the patches of tall pines. The mysterious discontent grew upon her.

"And I want you to put by all the troubled thoughts and anxieties. I have something quite wonderful to tell you. Lady Ashton is coming on. There is some business in New York that the colonel must attend to, and she has set her heart on taking us back with her. It will be some time through the summer; indeed, it may be any time."

"Oh, if I could go! But I can't. I must not even allow myself to dream over it."

"Why not? Ethel will not need you. Aunt Beaumanoir hoped we could keep you all summer."

"I might stay here. I could not go away—so far,

I know mamma would not consent. But it would be—heaven!” and her voice broke.

“Aunt Lepage was very fond of Lady Ashton. Surely she would trust you to her. And you will not be likely to go into much society next winter.”

“I—I don’t know.” Alice turned scarlet, looking away, then with a great effort back again. “I ought to tell you—I *must* tell you, Dell, though mamma said I was not to speak of it. But I can’t let you go on planning a pleasure like this, and thinking in the end that I had not been honest with you. I am—almost engaged. That is, I have promised to consider, and answer in August, perhaps. But oh, I know it has all been considered, and it can end only one way.”

“Alice, what have you done?”

“Oh, Dell, don’t look that way at me! Do you know you curiously suggest Aunt Aurelia when she is displeased. And it seems to me as if I couldn’t bear anything more.”

Alice gave a long, quivering sob, and yet she was not crying. Dell’s face softened immeasurably.

“I think I could understand, if you cared. It is the giving in against your will that puzzles me.”

“And I can’t care, in the sense of loving. If he didn’t love me so very much—and I can’t see why he should when there were dozens of girls eager for him.”

Dell thought. Aunt Lepage liked him, and he was the good match she had hinted about.

“I don’t see why you need marry until you want to; until you love someone,” said Dell, in a steady, meaning tone. “It’s the bother of a girl’s life—and the crown and blessing, I suppose,” she added, with a sudden solemn sense.

"Dell," Alice said suddenly, "what made you draw back with Leonard? We all thought it would be an engagement. Mamma asked him last winter, and he said evasively that you must be free to choose where you liked, and that on his part it would look like asking for Sherburne House. But it seemed to me that you did love each other. Forgive me, dear, but if you tried and the real love held aloof, you will know——"

"I had a girl's high, foolish thought of duty; of sacrificing myself that in some way everybody might be satisfied. And I did love him, but it was all the circumstances, not real soul election. I seem to love him now in almost the same manner. But I do not want to marry him. It isn't a love like Milly's or Violet's. It might be that of a sister."

"No, I do not think you can understand," Alice said slowly, while her cheek flushed and paled.

"I can understand that no girl or woman ought to marry a man she did not love. You do not think of the sacredness of it early in life, its awful significance."

"There are so many kinds of marriages it confuses one. And some of them are very—well, comfortable, and some of the love matches turn out very badly. If one could be sure! But, Dell, you need not marry until you are certain," with a sad longing in her voice.

"Yes, there is enough and to spare. Alice, come, share it with me. What if I should not marry at all? A long while ago, the first summer I was here, I made a good deal of trouble for everybody. Then I repented. The doctor was the good shepherd who took me in his arms and led me back to the fold God had placed me in. I had a curious feeling for a

while, that to truly make amends I ought to live with Aunt Aurelia and take care of her when she was old, and never marry. It might come true." Her voice was a little tremulous.

"But you wouldn't, for choice?" Alice said in surprise, studying her curiously.

"It might be the result of some higher choosing than mine," was the soft, grave answer. "Miss Neale has led a lovely life, and I am sure Aunt Aurelia has the respect of everybody. There are so many things to desire. Sometimes I feel as if I wanted to be out in the great world, doing the larger, grander work."

"And I would like a pretty home to keep, and someone who enjoyed it. I do not care about the strife and envyings of fashion," with a faint smile. "I don't see why this should have come to me when I didn't want it. Oh, Dell, I wish it was possible to do something, but I see the ordinary educations do not fit a girl for the struggle of life, if she has no especial genius. I *do* envy Ethel her gift. And in the party she goes with there is such a fine young fellow, who is to illustrate a very interesting book on Spain; a lady who is quite famous as a brilliant correspondent and magazine writer, and ever so many smart people. If it had not cost so much to go—— So there is nothing for a poor girl but marriage. Mamma is so troubled about everything. Oh, Dell, it seems as if I *must*."

"Violet was speaking of someone—a Mr. Phillips." Dell looked at her cousin in amazement.

"That is the one. She met him in the winter. He used to come a good deal, but when I found that he was in earnest I tried hard not to encourage him.

And I think now, if I had gone to the other extreme, he would not have been so eager. But he had a fancy nearly every girl wanted him. His vanity about it disgusted me. And yet it was true. He is very rich and gives elegant suppers to his friends, and sometimes they *do* drink too much."

"Oh, Alice!" Dell cried, in entreaty.

"Yes, it is dreadful. But he has promised to give it all up, and he is quite sure I can do so much to keep him in the right way. His parents are dead, and he has one bachelor uncle. His grandmother left him part of the fortune, and it is not to be touched until he is twenty-five, but has just been rolling itself up for ten years. After that, for ten years more he has only the interest. So there is a certainty for the future. Mamma thinks a great deal of that. He asked me the night before we had the last sad word from papa, and I refused him. But he came again, and while I was away he pleaded his cause to mamma and Ethel. He was in the party that went to Fortress Monroe. And mamma thinks it very noble in him to choose a poor girl when he might have a rich one."

It did seem so, even to Lyndell. She found her sympathies moving toward him.

"Still, there are other points to consider." Then Dell's heart beat with a great throb. What if she had taken the future of another soul in her hands? She had never felt quite at ease about Anita, though her judgment approved.

"If you loved him," hesitatingly, after a pause. "If you thought you might in time to come."

"But I don't. All our ideas are so different. He is bored so easily. He wants excitement all the time.

Oh, Dell, I am afraid that by and by, when I was very tired of it all, and perhaps faded a little, he would go his way, and oh, suppose I should be so thankful for a little rest that I wouldn't keep my hand stretched out continually to save him! He seems weak. I like strong men. I really admire Mr. Longworth for that. And yet Mr. Phillips can be very obstinate."

"Can't you resolve that you ought *not* to marry any man in whom you could not place implicit confidence?" Dell shrank from personal responsibility. The matter of advising did not look as easy as it had a few days ago.

"And he says little things not quite true, not true at all. So many of them do. When one is just talking for amusement——"

"I should lose faith in anyone who told me a lie," Dell said emphatically.

"I suppose it is hard to be true always. And, Dell, do you not think a great many people love to be flattered? Mr. Phillips does. Yet he professes to admire my truth and simplicity, as he calls it."

"But why do you feel that you ought to accept him?" the younger girl asked, somewhat puzzled.

"Oh, my dear! matters are so bad with us. Mamma insists that we cannot be a burden on Mr. Longworth. And she thinks if I was well settled—there would be two nice homes, you see. And when Florence grows up she will be very handsome, and we could put her in the best society. I shall be twenty-two on my next birthday. Yes, I ought to do something. But it frightens me."

"And are you really engaged?"

"Mamma has accepted him. I said truly that I

did not love him, but I promised to try. And last Saturday he sailed for Scotland, where he has some invitations to hunt or shoot—I've forgotten. He will be back in September. Oh, Dell! if he would see some other girl! If he would cease to care for me! He wanted mamma to go to Bar Harbor, and then he would not have gone abroad so soon. Of course she really couldn't afford to, and then we must have been out of society, mostly."

"I wish you would confide in Millicent," Dell said, after some thought. "But you cannot live a true and lovely life with a wrong beginning."

"Everything seems so changed and confusing. Mamma has put it in the light of duty. She says what is true enough, that she has not hurried us into any choice. I have had so much that has been nice and pleasant—all that beautiful time abroad with you and the other cousins, and last summer again. But I can't see just how to reconcile honest and true living with a wrong beginning, as you say. How can I ever get the strength to go against mamma and Ethel? If they would only be so vexed about it that they would let me stay down here always with you and Aunt Aurelia! Oh, Dell! help me to some courage in the matter. Would it be wrong to pray that Mr. Phillips might change his mind? Of course mamma would blame me for not promising positively. And then, if I didn't marry, she would bewail the fact. Oh, what shall I do?"

"You ought to pray for courage to do the right thing yourself," Dell said, but in a softened tone. If she would go to Millicent! If there was not a curious consciousness in Dell's mind that back of it all there was something that contributed to Alice's indifference.

And this impression was deepened with her cousin's last sentence:

"Sometimes I feel as if it could not make much difference; as if I should never be in the place where I could live out the best in me, the best that I want to be," and the tone was infinitely sad.

Dell did not glance at her, but she could feel the wavering color going over the fair face. So many little incidents seemed to array themselves in this leading. Had Paul Amory been at fault somewhere? Then her own cheek burned. Had anyone been at fault that the best and highest place should not come to her, but just pass her by with one swift glance? She would have no desecrated niches in her soul. Better a life of singleness forever.

"So you see," began Alice, "that I couldn't take the journey with you, even if you were generous enough to proffer it out of pure love. Mamma wouldn't consent."

"It might cut the Gordian knot," and Dell smiled. "It would give him a longer time to be true."

The swift scarlet flashed over the young girl's face. But Dell sat unconscious of any deeper meaning.

They were winding up the avenue, and now the sun was growing hot.

"We must take our drive over again to-morrow. We have not looked at one of the beautiful pictures, and there were so many. The whole earth is glad."

"You are very good to be so patient and interested in all my worries. I ought to have more self-reliance. Have I spoiled your morning, dear?" Alice looked up with pitiful entreaty.

"A drive can easily be repeated——"

"But a life spoiled in the beginning cannot be lived

over," Alice interrupted quickly. "It appears so different out here in the beautiful calm of nature. Dell, let me have a few days for resolution before we talk it over again. Oh, how cool and lovely Sherburne looks! And there is Aunt Aurelia! Oh, who is the lovely little girl? Surely that isn't Tessy Murray?"

But it was, and dinner also awaited them. Alice had a headache and was glad of a rest afterward, glad to excuse herself.

"She looks very much worn," Aunt Aurelia said. "She must have a nice quiet time and get rested. I am glad you are not in the whirl of fashionable life, Dell," and she glanced approvingly at the tall, rosy girl, with her face of content.

That evening's mail brought a note from Lady Ashton, brief, and written in great haste.

"We shall reach New York two days after this letter [it said]. I would ask you to come up, but we may have to go to Washington at once. Will it be convenient to take us in at Sherburne House?"

"Why, yes," said Aunt Aurelia cheerfully. "Indeed I don't know how we could spare you to go away now. What do you suppose keeps Millicent so much engrossed? Surely they are not beginning to think of the wedding so soon."

It had puzzled Dell. Millicent seemed in a curious little world of her own. She spent hours in her room, and no one disturbed her. There was a touch of abstraction in her moods now and then, as if she was living on some rare, intense satisfaction. Aunt Beaumanoir seemed to shield her from observation, as if she was in the secret. Was it Bertram Carew's love

that they wanted no one to remark just yet? For Bertram was corresponding with her. Dell had seen several letters directed in his hand.

"It is curious how many things come in between," she said to herself. "I wonder if I have been selfish in wanting too much of Milly? I believe it *is* a fault. I want a good deal of everybody. And yet I am willing Aunt Aurelia shall have Tessy, though it does crowd me out, only I am so busy," and she gave her soft, bright laugh to the twilight.

Yes, she was very busy. There were so many little things in life that never told. Was she sure of that? Had they not gone to make Miss Neale one of the sweetest and best loved women in the small world about her? And you could put Miss Neale at the head of an orphan asylum or some institution, and how admirably she would fill it. But oh! she would not want to go away from her home, and her poor, and her beloved brother. Oh, how could they do without Bertram? Yet, she, Dell, *was* selfish; she admitted it with humiliation. She really wanted the people she loved dearly. She wanted Millicent a good deal of the time. She and Millicent never would do anything together now, as she had vaguely dreamed. She thought of one being taken and the other left—she would be left.

The impatience and unreason of youth is so natural. It *is* indeed youth. With its eagerness to reach some grand fulfillment, some divine satisfaction! And with experience we learn that the exceptional only comes in rare hours; that we cannot fit it to the daily common life; that, indeed, we should soon exhaust ourselves in the rarefied atmosphere.

And there was Alice to think about. It seemed

hard to stand aside in the trial hour of any soul, and watch the struggle toward the goal. But if she should over-persuade? If she should incur the anger of Aunt Lepage, and, indirectly, Aunt Aurelia's displeasure? For after all, a *good* marriage seemed the great desideratum. Violet's engagement was good even in that sense. And though there were very tender love and many aims for the future that were to reach up to the best of real living, Dell wondered, if Mr. Amory had been poor and unknown, how it would have ended. But she couldn't imagine Violet being the wife of a poor man. Milly might. There were so many things she could do to make household life run smoothly. But dainty, delicate Violet, with her grace and beauty and refinement!

"I don't believe I should like to be poor myself now," she thought. "And I am sure Tessy would not. It is not poverty that makes people noble, surely, for there is so much that is mean and degrading and cruel among the poor. They are brought up to it and can't help it, and it isn't always their fault. I suppose it is the right use of money that makes it a blessing." Then she smiled a little as one of Miss Neale's sentences came to her; dear Miss Neale, who had a golden text for everything.

"To do good, and to distribute, forget not." Forget not! That came to her with a new sense; always remembering that earnestness of purpose and tenderness of heart went with the gift.

"But that doesn't settle the question whether it is right to give one's life and soul for it, as a man might in doing some great wrong, or a woman in marrying for it. And it isn't right for Alice. But who can counsel her against it?"

Dell was in a sore strait. All day long she kept herself busy, not evading Alice, but not falling into the mood that persuades a confidence. Alice was over her headache, and quite bright. Tessy was so full of inviting interest in everything, it almost seemed as if she divined some restlessness and ministered to it.

The evening mail brought several letters for her. She went up to her own room to read them. Tessy had one from Bertram Carew among hers, about a poor little pensioner of hers who had gone from a comfortless home to a hospital for an operation. And at the last, when all was favorable, the small residue of strength had given out. If they could have found her sooner!

Alice came down on the veranda presently. Her face was very pale and her eyes had a strained expression, as if she had hardly slept.

"Let us walk down the avenue," and she held out her hand to Dell, who felt it tremble nervously.

Quite out of the hearing of anyone, around the house they went. Alice had two letters in her hand.

"This is from mamma," she began huskily. "I should not let you read it, but I have quite decided now. I've been wrestling with it all day. I *had* made up my mind, I think, before Gifford's letter came, but that settled it. Oh, Dell! you must help me bear mamma's displeasure. I never could endure anger and coldness. I always give in."

Dell held it up to the waning light with a feeling of disloyalty, and a color mounted to her brow as she saw her own name. Mrs. Lepage had requested her daughter to remain at Beaumanoir until she came down, to see as little of Lyndell as possible, and on no

account to discuss the engagement. Nothing was to be said about it until Mr. Phillips' return. Florence's examinations had just begun, and in about ten days they would both be down to make plans for the summer. She wanted no foolish girl gossip about the matter.

"And I have disobeyed her beforehand," admitted Alice, with a sad little smile. "I think she is most afraid of you, Dell. You are so honest and sturdy and clear-eyed. Now read Gifford's. I thought it over last night until I was almost wild. And I feel now that my own impressions were correct, but I was afraid of misjudging him because I did not want to marry him."

There was a page or two of irrelevant matter, then Gifford began:

"I saw mother last night, and really wrung from her the fact that you are engaged to Vincent Phillips. It is enough perhaps to tempt almost any girl, and if you had as much strength of will as Ethel I shouldn't feel so utterly opposed to it—if it came to anything. We hear a good deal of talk about his doings and his extravagances, and some evil habits that might not reach mamma or women in general. I know how anxious mamma feels, and I am truly sorry for her, and ashamed that I cannot stand in the breach and care for you all, or that Harry is not here to comfort and sustain. But I know Aunt Aurelia will be good to you and give you a home until better times, and Dell will be the kindest and most generous of sisters. Have you really been dazzled by young Phillips? He has a large fortune, but, at the rate he is going, it will hardly last a lifetime. His habits are

bad, vicious; and he is dissipated—perhaps not more so than some other young men of fashion, but I think I have the best right, through my own great sorrow and repentance, to warn you. Oh, Alice! do not let your tender heart plead for him and consign yourself to a lifelong unhappiness, or divorce after a few years. I do not see what there is about him to win the regard of a girl like you who has no great longing for fashionable dissipation. But try, my darling Alice, to uproot what little tenderness you have for him, and do not be tempted by the money.

“The other reason is this: He has been engaged twice already. I do not think you can depend upon his word. So many young men feel free to make half love to any girl who takes their fancy, and who is not scrupulously guarded. I admit few mothers *would* refuse him. Still, I should not like your name coupled with his, only to have you thrown over in the end. If there has been a promise, will you not consider and retract it? At least, do not answer any letter of his until you have seen me. And forgive mamma if, in her anxiety, she has overpersuaded you.”

Dell clasped her arms about her cousin in heartfelt gratitude.

“It is given up, then!” she exclaimed. “I did not dare advise strongly, but I hoped there would be someone to do it.”

“I *felt* it was not the right thing,” interrupted Alice. “There is some fascination about him at first, a certain enthusiasm that bends itself to your ways and thoughts and beliefs; a seeming desire to be something better for your sake. It is flattering, too; yet after a little you are afraid it may not be sincere.

And I couldn't understand just why he wanted me. I didn't suppose in the early stages it was anything more than society's effusiveness, and did not take him in real earnest. But he was so tender and sympathetic when papa died, that I did yield a little and let myself think—be tempted. Of course, as he said, he could afford to marry a girl without any fortune."

"That did look chivalrous."

"But there were handsomer girls and real society belles. It puzzles me even now. If he had not been in earnest, he would not have spoken so positively to mamma. And I am not the kind of girl he needs for a wife. I understand that. He has a hard sort of frivolity about him, and I am afraid he doesn't believe truly in any real goodness—I would take Gifford's word. I was sure last night that it could not go on. I prayed that something might happen to prevent it. And a queer little thing did."

There was a tremble in Alice's voice.

"As what?" said Dell, filling in the pause.

"I went to Aunt Aurelia's room to get a bit of lace she had laid out on the table and forgotten. It was great-grandmamma's, I think. Her Bible was open, and my eye fell on one sentence: 'Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward.' There was no sign to be given, no help outside of themselves. They had just to go forward. It seemed meant for me. Don't despise me, Dell, but I have been trying all the afternoon to get courage to go forward and say I would not do this thing, and now I have resolved."

"Oh, my dear, thank God!" said Dell from the depths of her heart, giving her cousin an enthusiastic hug.

"I hated to disappoint mamma. I know she *has* set her hopes upon it. It would have been a triumph, of course."

"Yes, I can see that a girl even might be proud of it, if she was very worldly."

"It *has* tempted me. I am not as strong and noble as you think. I am only trying to be. Oh, Dell! do you suppose Aunt Aurelia will approve? The real world is so different from our little world. Most people would consider me foolish in the extreme."

"I feel certain you will find a good friend in Aunt Aurelia. You must let her read Gifford's letter. I am sure she would advise the same course."

"It is very hard to go against your own mother when she is in trouble and believes truly that she is seeking your good; that her experience and wisdom are better than a girl's narrow knowledge. But I feel so relieved. It has weighed on me like a nightmare. It has taken all the real heart out of life for the last three months. Did you think I had changed?"

"You seemed very nervous. Your father's death accounted for some of it, and we thought you quite worn out. Yes, I see how it was."

"I could not stand fashionable dissipation as Ethel does. It has no real purpose, and wearies me. Dell, will you let me come and grow old along with Aunt Aurelia? We seem to gravitate to Sherburne House. I am afraid we all lay burdens on you."

"I fancy they do not weigh me down to despair," with her light, heartsome laugh. What if they both grew old together here at Sherburne House, with an unconfessed "might have been" in each heart? Dell kissed her cousin fondly.

CHAPTER VII.

A REAL LOVER.

DELL and Tessy were out a long while the next morning. Mrs. Kirby was fain to keep them all day, but Dell was curious to know the result of Alice's confidence.

Aunt Aurelia's face satisfied her. She had come to read most of its meanings. Alice was a little flushed and showed traces of tears.

"Dell," said Miss Sherburne, after dinner, "will you come to my room a few moments?"

What a terror this had been years ago! She glanced up with a bright smile, and followed her aunt.

"I have been listening to Alice's story this morning," she began gravely. "I think she has made a wise decision. Of course if she loved this Mr. Phillips—but after Gifford's protest it would not be a wise engagement. Mrs. Lepage will consider that we have all interfered, so we must befriend poor Alice."

"I shall be only too glad." Dell squeezed Miss Aurelia's hand. She dared to take little liberties nowadays, cordial caresses.

"You have been very generous to your cousins, my dear. Money is the least part of generosity. The perceptions of possible good out of the things we have struggled against in our self-will comes slowly to some of us, but it is never too late. We learn to see more clearly, and are more ready to appreciate happiness,

more ready to care for that of others. And now shall we join to make Alice a happy girl, brave enough to bear her mother's displeasure?"

"Oh, Aunt Aurelia! let us keep her here until she wants to go away of her own accord."

"Yes, she told me of your thought. Let us join hands in doing it. The home, of course, has no real money value to either of us. But if we agreed in giving her an income she would feel more at ease, and would not be dependent upon her mother. Gifford, of course, can do nothing for the family. I shall educate Florence. There may be a little saved out of the wreck, and Edith has the best right to that. I could give Alice a sufficient income for all her wants——"

"Oh, Aunt Aurelia! it would be such a pleasure to me," interrupted Dell. "And I have so much more than anyone thought. I ought to do something, but no one is in real need, save Alice."

Aunt Aurelia gave a gentle sigh. Was it for any lost hope? Could she think of anyone in need of love?

"I knew you would like it," she returned, in a gratified tone. "And I suppose you would rather explain it to Uncle Beaumanoir. I must not take the credit of your kindly deeds. He had offered Alice a home until better times. Ethel will no doubt be generous with her when the keenest disappointment is over. I shall be glad to have two girls."

She bent and kissed her, and Dell went to find Alice with a light heart. She knew Aunt Julia would be delighted as well. They two could join to give her more liberty. It was hard for her to stay at Sherburne House so much when she could be away having good times with Uncle Stanwood. To be sure, she

could go away on her little vacations feeling that the boys were in good hands, and they were hardly old enough to be sent away to school.

Milly drove over with the baby and Cecil, and stayed to supper. Uncle Beaumanoir came for her, and Dell laid her plan before him.

"We are going to adopt Alice," she said enthusiastically, her face in a joyous glow.

"How many more?" he asked humorously. "You seem bent on gathering a family together. How does your other *protégée* fare?"

Dell's bright face clouded over.

"I hope everything is going right?" anxiously.

"It is right enough in one way. She studies hard, and her course is satisfactory to Mrs. Weir. But I think she doesn't care much about me. I have given her a choice as to where and how her vacation should be spent, and she has chosen to go to some little town with one of the teachers. Mrs. Weir approves of it."

Mr. Beaumanoir was relieved, though his tone did not express all he felt when he said:

"I think it an excellent plan."

"I should like to see her. But she does not seem to care," Dell exclaimed regretfully.

"Naturally she would hesitate about coming here."

"But I could go to her."

"I should want her to express some desire."

Lyndell flushed with a touch of mortification.

It seemed, the following day, as if Alice had gone back five years. Her eyes had a clear bright light, and the soft tint in her cheeks, the half smile that hovered about her lips, brought anew the girlishness it had been a sad thing to miss. When her mother

came Uncle Beaumanoir would take the onus of an explanation.

At noon there was a telegram from Lady Ashton. They would be there by the afternoon train.

Tessy and Dell went over in the carriage. Alice had some callers. They stopped a few moments to see Miss Neale, and then drove over to the station. There were not many passengers. The two girls watched eagerly. No lame soldierly man stepped out, but someone carefully handed Lady Ashton to the platform, and then glanced around.

Dell was so surprised at the moment that, though she had her hand raised, she did not wave it as had been her first joyful intention.

"Go, Julius," she said. "Oh, it is Mr. Osborne!"

Yes it was Mr. Bevis Osborne, stouter than when he had parted with her in London, and she thought handsomer. She leaned out of the carriage. Julius was taking the satchel and the trunk check.

"My dear Lyndell!" cried Lady Ashton. "You have changed indescribably, and yet I should have known you anywhere."

"But where is Colonel Ashton?" asked Dell, in alarm.

"Oh, haven't I explained anywhere? Why, that is quite unpardonable! I am sure I said it was a question which should come."

Dell held out her hand to Mr. Osborne with a bright smile of welcome. "We are glad to see him anyway," she said eagerly. "It was only the surprise."

He looked disconcerted a moment. "I should have come later on, if not now," he said, with a touch of gravity. "I have wanted to see how the merry London party fulfilled the promise of their girlhood."

There was a subtle indication of satisfaction, nay, more, admiration in his glance that brought a delicate color to Dell's face.

"The plan was changed only a few hours before starting. The colonel had a fall some weeks ago, and his old wound troubled him. Then there was so much business to do, and he has grown rather indolent. He doesn't love to hurry around. And in sending telegrams I must have omitted it. A stupid blunder! and I am very sorry."

"Oh, it cannot matter." She felt very glad to see Mr. Osborne again, and she would not allow Lady Ashton to blame herself.

"I find I am not of as much account as the colonel. It is rather mortifying to one's vanity, and I have a good deal," Mr. Osborne admitted.

Lady Ashton was being helped into the old carriage, and Tessy properly introduced. Julius had taken possession of the trunk. Now he mounted the driver's seat and touched his hat.

"You see we are quite Americanized," began Mr. Osborne. "We have learned to combine business with pleasure. I am the business partner in the concern."

"And I have wanted some of you girls so much. But I am getting quite settled and am really in love with our new home and the wonderful land. And the colonel is the most obstinate case of conversion—or shall we call it perversion? Lady Trenholme would. You hardly dare mention Canada or Australia as places of emigration in his presence. He would turn half of England over into California. It is a land of perfect romance, and we have most of the appliances of civilization and intelligence. Miss Ashton is to

come in the autumn and winter with us. And I want a regular house party for months. Ought I to warn you that I am on a kidnaping expedition?"

Dell laughed, with shining eyes. "I think I am an American of the Americans. And I long to see all the wonders of my own land. Perhaps my sense of comparison may be improved by what has gone before."

"There is a great deal of man's handiwork on the other side. Nations cannot exist without leaving some traces of themselves behind, even the prehistoric man," with a humorous gleam in his eyes. "It is a relief now and then to get back to nature, but we are trying to reduce her mighty forces, and I am afraid we shall end by destroying her magnificent beauty."

"Oh, Bevis! no one ever can take away the Rocky Mountains, and the Yosemite Valley is safe from the iconoclast. And the beautiful coast! Then there is that wonderful Alaska. Yes, you must see it all. Do you young Americans realize your vast and magnificent heritage?"

"No, we do not," admitted Tessy earnestly. "We sometimes think there is nothing outside of New York. But Virginia is beautiful, too."

They seemed in the very heart of the woods. And yet it was only a space between. Dell flushed suddenly. Here was the green nook in which she had unburdened her trouble to Dr. Carew, with Anita sitting in her phaëton just yonder. How long ago it seemed! Yet it was much farther back that Mr. Osborne had come into her life. She could remember so many delightful episodes. He looked so strong, so manly sitting there, so in earnest about everything, and he had not forgotten the beginnings, either. They talked over Trenholme. They laughed at the æsthetic

evening in London, and Mr. Amory's picture that had grown out of it. When she raised her eyes there was a depth of expression in them, the abstraction of remembering something that could never quite pass away, as one looks at a spiritual vision in moments of exaltation. The startled flush in her face seemed to go down to the inmost depths of her soul.

"We will go around the Beaumanoir road," she said to Julius. She was not ready to take any unknown thing into her life so suddenly.

"There have been changes all about you, if they have not touched you," Lady Ashton began. "Marrying and marriages to come. It always seemed hard to me that just as the confidential and appreciative age between mothers and daughters was reached, some stranger should come in and bear off the fruit of your years of endeavor. Miss Ethel, I suppose, is very happy. Some newspaper correspondent spoke of her as one of the social successes of the season. And Alice——" tentatively.

"Alice is staying with us," said Dell. If she had glanced up, she might have been puzzled again.

"I am glad. I am hungry for a household of girls after these years of two men. The colonel's brother had a very charming daughter, but after the manner of women she married and is up at Portland."

"If you wanted them to stay single, you set them a bad example," subjoined Mr. Osborne.

"I don't suppose we do, really." Lady Ashton colored a little. "A happy marriage is a woman's best portion."

"You can almost vie with old England here," Mr. Osborne said, as they paused to glance up the winding avenue at Beaumanoir.

"You will like Sherburne House better still," the lady said. "It is charming."

He thought he did as they came upon it. The leafy arcades thinned out, there were subtle reflections of light and color in the air, from the sun setting behind the hills. Faint purples and saffrons blending into violet up in the nearer spaces, and thinning again to pale translucent greens and varying lines of pink. The wide façade of the house lay in deeper shadow, giving it an almost weird perspective.

Win had been running races with Floyd, and stopped suddenly in a most picturesque attitude. Alice rose out of the vista of vines. Her thin black gown of some soft, tissue-like material seemed artistic draping for the slim figure, and enhanced the fairness of her skin and the soft bronze gold of her hair. She glanced at the carriage, then stood quite still. Mrs. Sherburne and Aunt Julia came forward with their hospitable greetings. When the introduction and the little explanation had ended, Mr. Osborne turned to Alice Lepage, and took both hands in his clasp.

And Dell knew then. The indescribable expression of rare, fine understanding flashed up in her cousin's face, bringing its veil of scarlet, its sudden white tremulousness, and then the informing knowledge settled to a beautiful calm. Only a moment or two, right in the midst of the talk; but it seemed a question asked and answered.

Dell was overwhelmed with a passing shame, and then she smiled with a curious sense of relief. Bevis Osborne had not crossed the continent for *her* sake. And she had been quite mistaken as to where Alice's fancy lay. She was very glad, even if her own penetration had been at fault.

The guests were shown to their respective chambers. Dell and Tessy went to freshen themselves up. Alice Lepage sat quite still in a corner of the porch. That this should happen so; that she had been saved from her own too easily persuaded will; that her hands were clean, the hands he had taken in a clasp that meant so much, free from any promise! For two days ago she had written, lest her mother's entreaties should again overcome her resolution.

Tessy and Dell were in white. Mr. Osborne was very much interested in Miss Ashton's favorite, that she confessed she coveted and was fain to take for "good and all." "As if a single woman past the uncertain age might not indulge in a little motherly feeling," she had urged in excuse. And certainly, he admitted, Tessy Murray was quite a picture in herself.

Mr. Osborne's stay just now must be brief. He must be back in Washington to-morrow evening to meet some parties on business.

"We are all seized with a money-making mania in this new world," he said laughingly. "I think it must be in the air. And when a grand scheme enters the mind we have to start about it at once, lest some other person's mind may be equally inventive. The main thing seems to be to get there first. That is very slangy and reprehensible, isn't it?" glancing up, with a humorous smile. "But we are first, and we want to reap the benefit of priority and add to our fortunes."

"And the colonel thought Mr. Osborne better equipped for running around and doing the talking," declared Lady Ashton. "Everything seems to require so much talking. It is a grand scheme of irrigation

that will benefit a large tract of country—make it extremely valuable.”

“And two men in Washington own a great deal of the land. Whether they will be willing to sell, or whether they will join us, is the question. We did not want any agent or go-between to make a fortune out of both sides and leave us in the lurch, nor any syndicate to tie us up. I do not know how eloquent or persuasive I can be——”

Dell half intercepted the glance that went over to Alice and brought a wavering flush to her fair face.

After supper the young people went strolling about the lawn. Alice kept close beside Tessy, the new knowledge was so strange she was not ready to face it. Mr. Osborne amused them all with some gay stories. Was he *really* in love, Dell wondered. To her impatient nature it seemed as if he must be longing with fervent passion to tell the story of the two years. Oh, what if he had been too late!

The soul that held his love, that had dreamed over it without any adjustment of relationship, like many a young girl seeing possibilities and not knowing for whom they may be intended, not daring to stretch out her hand until some certain sign was given, was content with what had been shown. And so they talked away the early summer evening amid the sweet night sounds and fragrances until the tardy moon began to silver the interstices of the trees, and make silvery wavering patches on the walk, and give a magic touch to the short grass.

They all said a cordial good-night. Alice went to Aunt Aurelia's room, and stayed so long that she merely called a soft, sweet good-night to the girls in their darkened apartments.

But Dell seemed curiously wakeful. Something out of the common routine had touched her. A strange, new experience, not hers, but so near, bounded and saved by such a narrow margin! The very sense of the escape thrilled her. She lived so much in other people's lives.

There was a difference between Mr. Osborne and most of the men she met. He impressed one with strength, certainly; as if he knew what he wanted, and knew how to set about getting it in a high, manly fashion. To be sure, he was years older than Leonard or Bertram Carew. Yes, young Dr. Carew had some of this inspiriting force. Oh, would any romance like this happen to her, any real surprise of love?

Dell Sherburne buried her scarlet face in the pillow.

Had she dreamed all this, she asked herself in the morning? Mr. Osborne was so very friendly with all of them. They made a tour of the house and looked at the hundred year ago portraits, down to the modern one of Miss Lyndell Sherburne. They went out to the quarters, and some of the little darkies danced and sang for Mr. Osborne. They drove over to Beaumanoir, and it was so late that Aunt Laura *would* keep them to luncheon, especially as Mr. Osborne and Mr. Beaumanoir were in the midst of an animated talk. Millicent and Violet were lovely and at their best.

And all this time Alice had been strangely shy and sweet, and Mr. Osborne—well, not indifferent, since Dell held the clew, but otherwise she would not have suspected.

"We shall keep Lady Ashton indefinitely," said Mrs. Stanwood. "And we shall look for you whenever you have a little leisure. Can you not give us Sunday?"

"To-day is Thursday; why, yes, I think so. At all events you can't be such heathens here at the East as to keep to business the whole seven days. Saturday, then, if it is convenient to you. Thank you for your kindly hospitality."

He held Alice's hand as if loath to give it up. But that was all. No word of any kind. No sweet confidence to be shared.

But there was very little time for sentimental reveries during the next forty-eight hours. There were so many things to talk over with Lady Ashton. Blanche Trenholme was engaged. Did they remember a Mr. Blythe that they met at Trenholme Court? He was getting to be quite famous on account of some plans for a church and a townhall. There was another Miss Trenholme going to be introduced shortly.

"And with all the children, she cannot spare me one. I think I shall be compelled to apply to an orphan asylum," declared Lady Ashton.

Certainly, if she mistrusted, she did not make the slightest sign. She was very tender to young girls, a true and lovable woman who should have had a household of them.

Leonard came down with Mr. Osborne on Saturday. Mr. Beaumanoir had given him a note to his son, and Leonard had been interested at once, indeed proved of some real service.

It quite changed the aspect of affairs. Leonard took possession of Dell and Tessy. Lyndell made no demur, though she readily gave Tessy the larger share of her cousin. They had some very amusing skirmishes, in which Tessy's wit gained her the advantage not infrequently. Mr. Osborne and Alice fell a little behind and presently strayed off altogether.

"I shall be over again to-morrow," Leonard said with his good-night to everybody. It was quite like old times to have him so much at home. Lady Ashton was absolutely charmed with him, one could see.

"Everybody is hurrying out of town," he said, "and I am longing to take up the rôle of a gentleman of leisure. Or else I'll go out to California and cast in my lines with Mr. Osborne. They have a tremendous thing, if it gets engineered through rightly. But it will take time."

And then a quiet, restful Sunday; the two drawing nearer together: Mr. Osborne taking a curious, vaguely defined right, and Alice yielding with a shy timidity. Did anyone see?

They were going to take Lady Ashton over to Dr. Carew's to spend Monday. Miss Neale had made her call and given her invitation. And then a day at Beaumanoir. Mr. Osborne would be coming and going until the last of the week, when he had to be in New York. He and Miss Sherburne were out on the porch while the others were getting ready, as he was to go to Ardmore with them. Alice was curiously grave, almost troubled, it seemed, with a soft color like twilight shadows in her face.

But when he said good-by to her, Dell knew the story had been told. And she was going to stay at home with Aunt Aurelia! Lyndell felt defrauded.

Yet it was a happy day. How could it be otherwise at Dr. Carew's? Dell was mysteriously thoughtful, with all kinds of vague questioning. How was it that Tessy Murray fitted in here as if she had grown up with them all. Everywhere she seemed to infuse some subtle influence of her own, a gentle yet piquant individuality.

It was quite dusk when they came home, but the summer evenings were long now. Dell ran upstairs to change her gown; she was warm and a little dusty after the drive.

"Dell"—softly, with a tremor in the voice.

"Oh, Alice! May I guess? But I have known it ever since he came. To think of all this time! Oh, what if——"

"If I had lost it in that way, I think I should have deserved to lose it. I shouldn't have been worthy. Of course I shouldn't ever have known. And I am not sure but a girl's safeguard is a true and high ideal. I have not lived up to mine. I *have* some weak strands in my character. I couldn't uphold and govern as some women do. I want someone strong for me. I want someone I can rely upon in all things, to the end."

"And you loved him!"

"No—it was not that. Oh, Dell! if I had loved him as I did after the consciousness came to me the first night of his arrival, I could not have promised to consider any other man's wishes."

"I liked him so much over there in London," Dell said, "but I did not dream!"

"You and I were not dreaming of lovers very much. We were just having a good time. And he was not thinking of marrying. He did not feel that it would be fair to ask a young girl to share a rough, pioneer sort of life. And we seemed so rich then, although he said, if I had been poor and used to hardships, he would not have hesitated. It is queer how you make an impression upon other people, as if you planted something in them that took root and grew. I suppose I unconsciously measured other men by him

until the standard settled itself, but no one came up to it," and she gave a soft, comprehensive smile, as if she was assured of the reason.

Dell could not make the mystery clear to herself. To come so near to loss, with no comprehension of future blessedness!

"I partly understood when I resolved to break the entanglement with Mr. Phillips. Dell, I do not think he loved me; and I have a feeling that he would have found some way of slipping out of the engagement later on. He has been flattered so much. He has found so many girls and their mothers striving to attract him. And when he came to one who didn't want him or his money it roused a desire to triumph. People who have so much want new sensations. I do believe, if I had shown any real fondness, he would soon have tired of me. And he persuaded himself it was a really grand thing to want to marry a poor girl. It made him a hero in his own eyes. I did not have any real faith in him. And I gave in at last with a feeling that something would happen, and that I would not have to marry him. Afterward I was so horribly afraid the something wouldn't happen that I was almost wild. That was why I told you, although I knew mamma meant me not to tell anyone. And Gif's letter just crystallized the whole matter, and made the wrong stand out so sharply I couldn't go on. Dell, dear, you and Aunt Aurelia have been very good to me."

Dell gave her a passionate hug. "I am so glad you did it by yourself," she said. "That the best thing was not so near at hand that you could balance them, either."

"Oh, Dell! I should be forever ashamed of myself

if I could do such a thing. I shouldn't feel fit to take any good man's love. I never thought of Mr. Osborne in any hoping way. I just prayed God would give me strength to meet the consequences of what I had to do. I was not so afraid of the doing. I never wrote a letter with a more joyful heart. I just resolved to go forward."

"Alice, suppose he had not come?" Dell clasped her with a quiver.

"I should have had my own self-respect all the same. Why, I would a hundred times rather never have married, but lived here and been Aunt Aurelia's girl to my life's end."

She was smiling through tears.

"Would it be very hard, I wonder, to make up one's mind to live single?" Dell asked, in a rather strained voice. "Of course if one had a romance like Miss Neale, or a family to engross one like Aunt Aurelia——"

"Why, I do not think it would be hard. You would miss something out of life, the care and love that is for you alone, and the companionship—when it is a true marriage like Aunt Laura's and Aunt Jue's. But, Dell, single women are coming into fashion. Still one needs to be rich or have a genius. But even without either, I should not have been sorry, once, that I gave up Mr. Phillips. Only I should have had to spend winters with Ethel, and know all the time she and mamma were making efforts to marry me off. Poor mamma! Worldly success and pleasure are the only things worth striving for in her estimation. I wish she could come down here and be happy."

That was quite impossible, Lyndell felt.

"And Mr. Osborne has been loving you all this

time," she said presently, with a longing in her voice.

"Well, not exactly," Alice laughed, with a tender joyousness. "He admitted that, if he had been younger and richer, he would have asked me in London. But he thought, as matters stood, it wouldn't be fair. I like his manliness in that," she said proudly. "But he used to dream about me, and listen to the things you said in your letters. And when he heard about papa's illness and the misfortunes he began to plan about me. You never told the worst until papa's death. He felt it was no time then to come on and ask his question, especially as they had begun to consider this business project even then. And he kept thinking I was very young; as if, like everyone else, I had not grown two years older."

"It is a real romance. And I am so glad it has happened to you. But wasn't it queer that there should have been that little blunder? Were you surprised?"

"Oh, Dell! I was transfixed. His look asked me a question and mine answered it. But I knew I had to tell him this wretched episode of my weakness, and he said just as I felt about it: 'Thank God, you didn't know of my coming, and that you wrote before I came.' But it will be my shame that I ever listened at all."

It was a wonderful interposition. Dell thrilled to it again as she glanced into Alice's happy face.

"And there was nothing really said until Sunday evening. I dreaded my part in the confession. But we understood each other. This morning he had a talk with Aunt Aurelia, and she accepted him cordially. She has been so sweet to me to-day. He is

not to see mamma until she comes down, and that will be on Friday. Aunt Aurelia is to set the matter straight for me."

"Girls, girls"—and Aunt Jue looked in, a trailing white ghost—"do you realize how late it is! You will have no beauty sleep, and there are days and days to come in which you can talk your fill."

They laughed and came and kissed her, then said a tender good-night to each other.

But Dell took to bed with her the mystery and rapture of that love-look she had intercepted. Would ever any eyes look into hers like that? Was it wrong to wish for one supreme love to glorify life, for one draught of perfect happiness? Milly, Violet, and now Alice.

But was not idealizing or desiring what was another's covetous and wrong?

CHAPTER VIII.

PAIN AND PLEASANTNESS.

THE romance had not faded with the morning. It really touched Lyndell to see how delicate and tender Aunt Aurelia was with Alice. And Tessy, who had half guessed and was wholly delighted, filled the trio of happy girls.

For love is always new. It carries that stamp of the divine about with it. And youth lends of its own delicious sweetness. There may be wiser purposes and experiences later on, there may be an after-bloom of love even, but there is only one youth, one thrill of unalloyed newness.

They all went to the Beaumanoirs' on Wednesday, and Mr. Osborne came down and drove over home with them. He was Alice's lover then. They were all together, and he was delightfully social and full of bits of news and talk. But by common consent they gave him the corner of the porch, and Tessy and Dell walked out under the trees, almost in love with the lover himself.

Lady Ashton had known his intention. There was the chance of Alice's affections being elsewhere engaged but it seemed as if Dell must have spoken of it in her chatty epistles. She was sure now to have one sweet girl, who would be like a daughter. Bevis Osborne had grown into a sort of brotherhood with the colonel and herself.

Julius drove Aunt Aurelia over to Beaumanoir on Friday afternoon.

"It is so lovely and generous of you to take the brunt of this," Alice had said, with her arms around the neck of the elder woman, and her firm young cheek pressed against the wrinkled one.

"Lovely and generous." The words were sweet to hear. It was good to have the happiness of a young soul in her hands.

They had not much time to speculate upon the result, for there was an influx of young company, and some entertaining games of croquet, some music and singing. The load had just driven away when Aunt Aurelia arrived.

"It is all settled," she said to Alice, "and there will not be any trouble. Mr. Osborne and Leonard are coming down to-morrow, and he will plead his own cause. You can go to bed content."

"Oh, thank you a thousand times!" How light of heart she had grown. Aunt Aurelia looked into the shining eyes. Was there any medicine like happiness?

But there had been a stormy time. Aunt Aurelia had gone armed with Gifford's letter, which his mother had scouted indignantly.

"Mr. Phillips drinks a little at suppers—all young men do. A rich young fellow like that has many enemies and detractors, though they are glad enough to accept his generosity. Do you suppose Mr. Longworth would have asked him to his house if he had been vicious and disreputable?"

"Gifford did not say disreputable. And Alice was firmly convinced that her engagement would only lead to unhappiness," Aunt Aurelia replied, with rather severe dignity.

"I told her to keep away from Sherburne House. Dell's head is full of romantic nonsense, and she always does infect Alice with it. I did not want them together. If Lyndell Sherburne doesn't make some sort of scandal before you get her safely married I shall miss my guess."

"Edith, she came to me for advice, and I gave it. Lyndell had no voice in the matter. And it is my purpose to take Alice under my especial charge, as she will shortly be married, and to provide her wedding outfit. She has chosen for herself, and if you can listen reasonably——"

"This is the reason, then—the deceitful, underhand girl! With whom has she been carrying on a clandestine intimacy? I will never, never consent. This is the reward of my care, of Ethel's generosity, the pains to put her in the best of society and give her exceptional advantages! The ungrateful, wretched girl!" Mrs. Lepage stamped her foot in anger.

Miss Sherburne looked steadily at her with unwonted sternness:

"I have never been in the habit of condoning improper or disrespectful conduct. There has been nothing clandestine. A man with the sincerest regard for her has come from a distance to win her, and I for one feel thankful that she was free to accept. When you are in a proper mood to listen like a reasonable mother who has her daughter's welfare truly at heart, Mr. Beaumanoir will tell you the rest."

Then Aunt Aurelia rose stiffly and walked out of the room.

But surprise and curiosity won the day. A feeling also, that, treat the matter loftily as she might, she had received many favors at Sherburne House. But for

its hospitality she must have spent the small remaining sum out of the wreck of their fortunes. Gifford had fled to it as a place of refuge. And somehow she could not have left Mr. Lepage so much to himself in any other place without invidious comments. Aunt Aurelia was very generous, but then, none of the others needed it. She had been rude, disrespectful. And who could have so suddenly attracted Alice's attention? Whom had she seen that she could resolve to accept on so short a notice. There was Floyd Mason, but certainly that would be a poor marriage speculation for a fortuneless girl. Spencer Kirby—that would not be so bad. Spencer would take his uncle's business in the course of time, and Mr. Whittingham was in comfortable circumstances, really well off. Alice would go home to live, of course. She recalled the fact that Mrs. Kirby always had admired Alice. They were well connected, irreproachable people. She would be a welcome visitor. Altogether, then, it was not so bad, but she did feel bitterly disappointed.

If Alice had evinced more enthusiasm about Mr. Phillips, his ardent regard could easily have been fanned to a marriage. Truth to tell, she *was* afraid she had let the golden moment slip, and that by autumn his passion would have cooled. But to have two daughters splendidly married, when she had not really been a pushing, maneuvering mother!

Still she could content herself with Mr. Kirby. Alice would fade rather easily; she began to show signs of it, even at one-and-twenty. And to be relieved of all further anxiety was something.

When Aunt Aurelia went to the dressing room to put on her wraps, Mrs. Lepage followed her.

"My dear aunt," she began, in a mollifying tone, "I was rude and ungracious to you half an hour ago. But I was so surprised that Alice should take such an important step as giving up her engagement without consulting me, when she had agreed to it only so short a time before. And I am sure she has never even hinted or suggested any other regard. A mother is wounded to the quick to be shut out of her daughters' confidence, especially when she has tried to give them happy, care-free lives."

"A girl cannot always tell until a man speaks," returned Miss Sherburne, with some asperity.

"I suppose it is Spencer Kirby. Of course I could not really object, but it cannot be considered a brilliant marriage."

"It is not Mr. Kirby." For a moment Miss Sherburne almost wished it had been. "You heard that Lady Ashton had come?"

"Laura spoke of it. You know I have been staying at Georgetown in the most secluded fashion. One evening Gifford called, and I had gone over to the convent with some friends. And I heard Mr. Osborne came with her. Mr. Beaumanoir seems to think they are on the highroad to fortune. So poor Warren believed, and it was the first step to misfortune. I have not much confidence in these Western schemes," and the lady sighed.

"It is Mr. Osborne," said Miss Sherburne stiffly. "He has been waiting until he had something worthy to offer, I believe, but now he has summoned up courage to offer what he has to a poor girl who took his fancy long ago. Alice was as much surprised as anyone. But if her engagement had held her, I think she would have had sufficient principle not to have

allowed it to come to a declaration. There has been nothing underhand. He spoke to me at once in the most gentlemanly manner, and wished to see you. If anyone is to blame, it is I, since I decided."

Mrs. Lepage began to cry a little. She could not tell whether she were disappointed or pleased.

"It seems quite dreadful when one has been educated and accomplished as Alice has, and understands French and music so well, to waste it all on a Western ranch among cowboys and laborers. I do wonder that she could. And a person so well connected as Lady Ashton made a great sacrifice in coming out, as she and the colonel did. Mr. Osborne was a rather superior man, as I remember, but it does not take long to degenerate among inferior associations. I never have had any fancy for Western life, nor for people with newly acquired riches. I am afraid Alice is laying up a disappointment for herself," and Mrs. Lepage wiped away a few tears of vexation that all this had happened without her assistance.

Miss Sherburne tied her bonnet-strings with unnecessary force, and drew her mantle about her with the dignity of a Roman among an ungrateful populace.

"You will see Mr. Osborne to-morrow," she said haughtily. "Whatever objections you have can be made to him."

Miss Sherburne leaned back in the carriage, not abating much of her dignity, but wondering a little about the aims and purposes of life. Not many years ago she had taken great pride in Mrs. Lepage. In that time—how long ago it seemed, when Lyndell Sherburne's fate seemed wavering in the balance—she had been guided almost entirely by her opinions. How cold and narrow and selfish they looked now!

How could she have found plausible excuses for staying away from her dying husband? Aunt Aurelia had never recovered from the shock this had given her ideas of wifely devotion.

Had she once been like that? Laura and her husband had looked at the side of right and justice, and if she could have listened then! But she had repented and tried to make amends. She had taken up the larger view of the present life, and believed more in the joys to come; even the reward to him who entered in at the eleventh hour, to him who was faithful over a few things. And she was trying in the time left her to be faithful, to care for the things of the world to come, to sow seeds of kindness and outgiving, not as she desired, always, but as others needed.

Presently, from the depths of her heart she pitied this poor worldly woman who was trying to fill broken cisterns. And she was glad the young soul that had trembled so in the balance had swung over to the right side, had turned away from the gauds of mere worldliness. There was a sacred and serious side to life. There was a sacred and serious side to marriage. It was "not to be entered into lightly."

And all the next day watching Alice, blithe and light-hearted, with the rose of content coming and going in her cheek, she was touched by the great miracle of the happening. Was God keeping watch that it should not come too late? She was awed as well.

At mid-afternoon the carriage-load drove over, with the two young men on horseback. They were all in the gayest of spirits, so it had been settled amicably. Indeed, it would have been a very exigent mother if she was not satisfied with so manly a suitor as Bevis Osborne.

Alice received the congratulations blushing. There was something a little grudging in her mother's kiss, but the presence of Lady Ashton had a soothing effect on Mrs. Lepage. If Osborne had been a younger brother or a nephew—if the charm of rank *could* have extended to him!

"My dear," said Milly, "we are all delighted with the surprise and the romance, and the loyalty of the man. We like him so much. We shall be sorry to have you go away, but it doesn't seem so far as Europe. And you are not giving up your country. Why, we shall have stirring times in the autumn! But I must not anticipate a lover's confidence. Each girl must hear and answer for herself."

Fanny Beaumanoir was a young lady now, rather consequential, but she had failed of her childish aspirations, expectations, perhaps. She had counted on being tall; the Beaumanoirs and Sherburnes were, and she was merely medium size, a trifle too large to be *petite*, and not large enough to reach the mark of elegance Milly and Violet had attained. Her plumpness was very well now, but it was too suggestive of stoutness by and by. Then, in spite of all precautions, her hair had turned brown, and was near the color of Dell's, while Violet's still held its rare gold. And Fanny had been so sure Dell's hair would settle to red.

Lyndell was certainly a fine-looking young woman, and would probably be handsomer at middle life. But the charm that illumined her face was her joyous, generous soul, her delight in the happiness of others.

The young people rambled about. Fanny took possession of Dell. There was so much to tell. Something about Fanny suggested her old-time school-mate Frasier Walden, and quite amused her. Mr.

Osborne carried off Alice to the most secluded dell, so Tessy and Leonard drifted together naturally. They were always having dainty little skirmishes; but Tessy's wit was of the amusing order, and held a sort of spice that kept him from dropping into sentimentalities. How charming and piquante she was; how curiously elusive!

Millicent was among the elders, who were discussing plans. Mr. Osborne had laid his before his prospective mother-in-law, who had demurred, of course; but he was the sort of man to carry the day when he was very much in earnest. He had succeeded in some of his plans, and now it was necessary for him to return, to take them up at the first end. This was an extensive irrigation scheme to take the place of a smaller one they had engineered successfully themselves, that would bring hundreds of acres of fine land under cultivation. For the next three months he would be engrossed with work and workmen, when another holiday might be possible. He would come East again, and desired then to be married. The engagement would be brief, to be sure, and the year of mourning for Mr. Lepage would not have ended, but a quiet marriage could not disturb anything.

Lady Ashton was to remain for the present. Mr. Osborne declared laughingly to her that he left his case in her hands.

"Violet's wedding will be in September," said Mrs. Beaumanoir, "and they will go abroad again to traverse some new fields, Egypt and Russia."

Then she gave a little sigh. Yet it was of God's ordering that there should be new centers of household life and love. One little circle could not contain all.

"There is no knowing the exact time of Ethel's return," Mrs. Lepage remarked, in a protesting manner. "And I do not think Alice would like to marry with her sister absent. I am sure Ethel would feel hurt."

"If it were different, and we could have a double marriage!" said the other mother.

"But you will be very grand. It would be so out of taste for Alice. And that is why I want Ethel at home. She is so up in society matters."

"Alice will go from Sherburne House," Aunt Aurelia said quickly, almost interrupting her niece. "Since I seem to have had a hand in the affair I mean to carry it through. Alice is to be my charge until that time, be it sooner or later."

"I am sure you are very good, since the poor child has no father, and no brothers in a position to care for her. I never could have dreamed two short years would work such a change."

"Your loss will be my gain," exclaimed Lady Ashton, with a smile.

"My dear friend, if it was not for you I never could consent to my child going out to that wild life," said the mother emphatically. "Alice has not the courage and resolution of Ethel."

"You would hardly call it a wild life if you saw it," began Lady Ashton, rather annoyed. "Though," with a half laugh that restored her good nature, "I know what a crude opinion I had of it myself. No one can form a correct idea of it until they have seen it. We can go into several beautiful towns that are centers of improvement quite as complete as anything at the East. And the famous health resorts call people from all parts of the world. Even we have

had a great many delightful visitors; and with a young person to help me entertain, we should take in many more. Bevis has his piano and flute, and we often play duets. We keep in touch with the best intelligence in our magazines and papers. And to my own surprise I have resumed riding again—that is one of our great pleasures. Just where we are, we *do* lack fashionable society, but if I had a companion to enjoy it no doubt we should take a few weeks now and then at the larger centers.”

“It will be just the life for Alice,” declared Millicent. “She doesn’t care so much for the dissipations of society. If I should get courage enough for another journey, I think it would be in my own land.”

“And I have Dell’s promise. How I should like to have a merry company of girls! I remember how charming they were abroad.”

“I can’t spare so many at once,” said Aunt Aurelia hastily.

“And we shall be quite lonesome. We have had Alice so much the last year. But we cannot hope to keep them always,” and Mrs. Beaumanoir sent up an unworded prayer as she glanced at Millicent’s sweet face. They had consented to her marriage and the separation it entailed with unspoken regret. Was there a lesson in it?

Mrs. Lepage felt herself ruled out, as it were. She had been the leading spirit so long that she rebelled inwardly. Of course, as she was poor she was not of much account. She could have no voice in the destiny of her own child. Her own sisters leagued against her, and it was plain that Aunt Aurelia meant to have matters under her own supervision.

She did not mind being relieved of trouble, but she

did wish to be consulted as if she still had some power. She wanted it not only understood, but acknowledged, that Alice *could* have done much better.

It really was quite a grand tea party, and the young people had a good time. Alice glanced furtively now and then at her mother, who was lavishing caresses on Florence.

"She is so lovely," the girl thought. "She will be such a comfort to mamma!" For she understood in Aunt Jue's fond clasp, Milly's tender smile, and Aunt Aurelia's glance that she had not sinned in allowing herself to be won by her lover's impassioned pleading.

"Three months will be long enough to write letters," Bevis Osborne had said, with an impetuosity that startled Alice. "After waiting two years in half-doubt, I do not even want to wait in certainty. I could not bear to think that a continent divided us; that a hundred things might happen! It would be different if I could see you every day or two. Your Miss Sherburne is a splendid advocate. She understood at once. With her on my side no one will be able to talk you out of it."

She did not want to be talked out of it. Ah, how could she have profaned even the thought of marriage with another! But she had not thought, she had shrunk from the subject with an awful inward distaste. And it was so much the more wicked to half promise, to even assent.

"You tender little soul, do not worry over that," her lover had said between kisses. "I can understand it all. Women have an immense capacity for self-sacrifice. And, as matters stood, you were willing to throw yourself into the breach and save your mother from care and perplexity. If I had known I should

have dropped everything and come to you then, and mortally offended my dear friend the colonel, and Mr. John Ashton, who is a man with far-sight and shrewdness. We were in the thick of the plans, also. Yes, I am glad, too, that it has come about just in this manner. I shall know that you are never longing for this young man's money, since you gave him up of your own accord," and he laughed with a tender approval.

"I hope you won't ever feel disappointed in me," Alice said gravely. "I haven't much self-dependence. I am strong only with some people. Dell inspires me. Dell gave me my first serious views of life, and she is so bright and full of amusement; so ready to comfort anyone in trouble. But I ought to feel more certain of myself——"

"So long as you feel certain that you love me, and that you are *glad* to leave all for my sake, glad to take the joy with all the pain of parting, for my future happiness," smiling tenderly upon her.

"I should be glad to do anything for your sake; any right thing," after a little pause.

"Heaven keep me from ever asking anything not quite right," he answered seriously.

"It seems almost wicked to be so content," she said to Dell that night. "And I have been so miserable all because I didn't trust God and go forward in the way I *felt* was right. Dell, do you suppose God was keeping watch and knew of the great happiness coming? It seems so mysterious," in an awed tone.

"Could anything happen without his knowing it? And why shouldn't *he* send happiness?"

Both girls kissed silently in a maze of wonderment. And Dell thought of the hard things, the evil things, the trials and losses. It was so easy to believe the

joys were sent when one was in the midst of them. But in the depths of sorrow, in the straits of indecision when no finger pointed out the way! Yes, the path was surely there. She had come out of it herself, even if over thorns.

On Tuesday Gifford joined them unexpectedly. For a fortnight or so his services in Washington would not be needed. Leonard was to remain all the week, and Paul Amory came down. Alice's engagement found the utmost favor. They all liked Mr. Osborne immensely. The week was crowded full of rides and drives, with an excursion to the Natural Bridge and down to Chesapeake Bay. Lady Ashton matronized one party, Aunt Jue and Mrs. Beaumanoir the other.

There were times when Dell asked herself what this renewed intimacy with Leonard meant. It had an unwonted, fascinating flavor. He seemed to give her the same brotherliness that he did Millicent, which was different from his gay, half-imperious manner with Violet. But when she was resting securely in this, there would be an imperceptible change, an impression that he was on his good behavior with her, and that it was just a little different from anything that had gone before.

He was gracious and sonlike to his parents in quite a new manner, with a touch of deference and true courtesy that improved him very much. He had been admired and petted and spoiled on every hand. Everything had conspired to foster self-indulgence. But it did seem as if self was not the first consideration now. Perhaps it was the manliness growing out of and above boyhood's carelessness.

Aunt Julia remarked it. "Do you know," she said to Miss Sherburne, "that Leonard is growing wonder-

fully like his father? Perhaps we *do* look too soon for the shaping and ripening of these young natures. Certainly his conduct through his difficulties of last autumn has been admirable. I am thankful now that we allowed Dell to settle the matter in her own way."

"But have you no fear of the future?" asked Aunt Aurelia hesitatingly. "I cannot rest until that girl's fate is decided. And Dell has some such romantic notions——"

"Miss Garcia will decide her destiny herself, I think. She certainly shows wisdom and spirit."

"But if this should all be a training for a decisive step in the end! If she should have the power to lure Leonard back? I know Dell would think it his duty."

"I am not so sure of that. Dell has some very high and fine notions about love, and Dr. Carew's opinion had a good deal of weight. No, I think we may safely consider that ended."

Aunt Aurelia drew a breath of relief.

"A son's marriage is of quite as much importance as a daughter's," she said, after a pause. "Violet's is very satisfactory, and I do hope Leonard's may be."

"A wish long deferred is sometimes granted unexpectedly. Leonard is wise in not urging any claim at present."

Dell was glad and yet afraid. Glad to have the cousinly kindness with no vague suggestions of anything nearer. Yet she experienced a startling fear now and then, because she was coming to admire him for his own real worth. He had taken such an interest in Gifford.

"This is only a temporary thing," he said. "Mr. Berford's secretary comes back in September. There are government clerkships, but one so soon gets in a

rut. I could take him into our office, but he seems disinclined to make the law his profession, though his father had hoped that for him. Alice's marriage will change the aspect of some things. I am most thankful she broke with young Phillips. What Aunt Edith could have been thinking of——"

"What Gifford said was quite true?" inquired Dell in the pause.

"Yes, it was true. I wonder that mothers can give their daughters to such young men. When a man is older and has settled down, there is a greater certainty and promise of permanence. But these ill-considered marriages pave the way for divorces. Not that I think it would have come to a marriage. Something would have happened next winter to break it off. And it seems as if Bevis Osborne was just the man for Alice. How fortunate she took the decisive step when she did! Still," and Leonard laughed a little, "Aunt Edith will never cease to regret Mr. Phillips until Mr. Osborne becomes a millionaire. And he may be. There seems so much chance in those ventures."

"Alice doesn't care for riches especially."

"No; Alice is quite an old-time girl, like your Tessy Murray. I think the chances for men and women to live happy, reasonable lives have not been quite extinguished while such girls are growing up right in the whirl of new ideas and unrest and fashion. Miss Murray is quite as much at ease and as unaffected as if she had been brought up in the very heart of luxury. But I must admit that Mr. Murray is every inch a gentleman."

Dell's cheek glowed with pride.

"And she has quite wound her way around Aunt Aurelia's heart. Dell, what is it? I can't make out

the subtle charm. She is so true, so sincere, and stands so on her own ground. You really have to come over and get her, but the fragrance and the sunshine seem to flash clear back to you, and I suppose Aunt Aurelia, like a good many others, likes the warmth of the sunshine and the old-fashioned scent of violets."

"I am glad to have you all like her so well," Dell said, with her clear honesty and a thrill at her heart.

She admired this breadth in Leonard. She liked to hear him praise Mr. Murray. And she gave thanks in the depths of her soul that there was no straining after effect in the family. People who discerned their worthiness came to them. They did not flaunt their riches in the world's face, for they had some of the best things the world could give.

But Dell understood now that with less refinement, and with the claim of money merely, they might have been objectionable. She had seen some people who had "come up from the masses," and brought their vulgarity with them. But the Murrays were not vulgar in the beginning.

She was glad to show Leonard her gratification at this, and her sincere appreciation of his interest in Gifford, as if Gifford was not his own cousin, and they were not all in some degree answerable for his future, in aid as well as counsel.

But Gifford had been drawn to her by her buoyant nature in the same manner that Alice had come to lean upon her. He liked her uplifting strength, the way in which she put courage into one, that she made efforts possible. Of course he had been very much to blame, and his mother, with all her other disap-

pointments, censured him severely. He felt helpless too, in this time of trial.

"But I hope I shall live to make amends for it all," he said to Dell. "I have set this purpose steadily before myself. Only the certainty comes to you that you never can wholly redeem anything; at least, that you can never blot it out."

"Still, if God has promised not to remember your old sins against you, I do not see why people should not be merciful and try to overlook them when you know one is in earnest."

"But it is the remembering yourself that brings the sting. I think of the money and the time and the advantages I have wasted. And to have committed a crime in intent! Oh, Dell! I don't know how you had the courage to stretch out your hand and save me! Poor father! I am glad he never knew. And out of the wreck I have his love, and the consciousness that I was so much to him during those last months."

"Oh, Gifford!" Dell cried, her face all aflush with a sacred pity for him; "do not brood over that. Uncle Beaumanoir proved it was only a plot to get the upper hand of you. And we are never to refer to it, you know."

"You have all been very good. And Aunt Aurelia is generosity itself in this strait. These are the things that can never be repaid."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ENCHANTMENT OF YOUTH.

“SOMETHING must be done speedily,” said Aunt Julia, in her earnest fashion that could hardly be called energetic, it had so much smoothness and softness in it. “You girls cannot sit and moon away the whole summer, and bewail your lovers.”

“We are not bewailing. We are comparing virtues and graces,” said Violet Beaumanoir saucily. “But *what* must be done?”

“Well, shopping, for instance; and wedding clothes. Unless you want to emulate *Enid* in her ragged gown. Nineteenth-century husbands are different.”

“I am to be spared most of the trouble,” declared Violet. “It was long ago voted a useless thing to carry coals to Newcastle. And Paul insists that we are to go in light marching order. When we have worn out one suit we are to buy another. And there is no present housekeeping to think about. We shall come home laden, no doubt, after having ‘ransacked the ages.’”

How could she talk in that familiar way about Paul Amory? Alice wondered. Even a little thought of Mr. Osborne brought the color to her cheek.

“And if Alice is to live in a wilderness,” suggested Dell, with a glint of humor, “*Enid* had to ‘ask not, but obey.’”

“Aunt Aurelia means that the wilderness shall

blossom as the rose. A summer excursion to New York may not be exactly *en règle*, but I doubt if we can afford much more. Lady Ashton is to go to Canada to visit some cousins, and will escort us to New York."

"And Tessy is proof against further blandishments," resumed Dell regretfully.

"I have stayed such a long, long while. Mamma wants to go away with the children."

She pressed Dell's hand lovingly.

"We shall want to bring you back."

"If I could be two people," said Tessy, with a delicious, lingering cadence in her voice.

"Oh, Tess! what mites they would be!" laughed Lyndell.

"I would like her to remain," said Aunt Julia. "What Aunt Aurelia will do without *one* girl, when she has been used to so many, I hardly know. Violet, you and Fanny must take turns staying over here."

"Milly has to go up to New York on some mysterious business," said Violet. "The best thing is for Aunt Aurelia to come over and spend a week with us. I do wonder"—she put her head down until her cheek almost touched Dell's in a girl's confidential fashion—"what Milly and Bertram find to write about so continually. And she has grown so strangely secretive. I think papa knows."

Dell knew too. She was thankful for the dusk, that hid the scarlet in her face as it came up with a protest from her soul. Oh, why in this world should people come face to face with possibilities; should see a thing that might be, and yet was as much out of one's reach and acceptance as if in some other world! It was a thing to struggle against, not dream over in a longing fashion. Then she raised her head resolutely.

As they were straggling in at bedtime Tessy lingered behind and caught Aunt Julia's hand in an entreating clasp. The touch of her soft fingers, the turn of her head, the slow raising of her eyes meant so much. The sincerity impressed one. She never indulged in effects.

"You said—did you mean you would like me to stay with Miss Aurelia while you were all gone?"

"Oh, my dear—how lovely in you to take it that way! No, I didn't *quite* mean it. We couldn't be so selfish. But we have enjoyed your being here so much."

"And I have enjoyed it. I am glad to give anyone pleasure. There are some things money can do, you know, and there are others that all the wealth of the world could not buy or win—Miss Aurelia's kindness and preference."

Aunt Julia stooped and kissed her on the threshold. Was she so sure? It was the sweet single-heartedness of youth. For there was no doubt but her father's standing and wealth and the respect paid him had been factors in Tessy Murray's behalf. Aunt Aurelia would not have yielded merely to that. Something in the fresh, generous nature, the outspoken delight and quaint bits of humor that never had any sting, had won the elder woman. She had a certain pride in Lyndell, and had come to appreciate her, to love her for her father's sake. But in regard to Tessy, it was love for no one's sake but her own.

"And we must not exact too much. You must have a bright time in New York with the girls. Shopping always has an interest for young people, and especially wedding clothes. But if they could spare you in the autumn, after Alice goes. It will be lonely

for Dell, as well as for Aunt Aurelia. Will you bear that in mind? We must not forget that we do not quite own you."

The sweet face was smiling as they emerged in the lamplight. She would have been glad to have the proffer accepted, and feel that she had been of some service to part pay for the delightful time. But there was no hurt feeling, no self-love to be wounded, no desire to be first.

Mrs. Stanwood repeated the proffer to Aunt Aurelia, who gave a half sigh of regret.

"No, of course," she said, almost stiffly; she was so deeply moved that she had to brace herself with sturdy denial. "You all try to spoil me with so much waiting on. And I shouldn't be alone—with this troop of servants. Besides, I've promised a day at the Masons' and at Dr. Carew's. I won't put them off until mid-winter."

Even the servants were sorry to have Miss Tessy go. Her rare art of infusing pleasantness into daily living told everywhere, like sunshine. And the offset, the grasping, capricious March wind, that sent leaves and dust and broken twigs about, was Mrs. Lepage.

"There is no use of my going," she said sharply. "I seem to have no voice in anything concerning my daughter. She is to be married out of hand on an indecently short engagement, considering that her father will have been dead barely six months."

"It will be as long as Ethel's. There seemed an imperative reason for that marriage."

"But everything is so different. I don't see how Alice can endure the thought of going away from everybody. But no one considers me."

"Violet goes for two years, perhaps. And Milly

took a longer journey than this. Since Aunt Aurelia assented, and she really was much pleased with Mr. Osborne, and as Alice will have almost a mother in Lady Ashton, we need not fear for her. Aunt Aurelia proposed first that she should wait a year, but it seemed hard to give them such a long probation when they were so far from each other. And since it is so, we may as well contribute to Alice's happiness as keep her nervous and troubled, and questioning her right to be happy. You will have only one anxiety then, Florence's education."

"As if there was not Gifford to think of, who may go wrong again without a moment's warning. Julia, you really have no sympathy for me. And I am sure I have always considered my family——"

"There, dear! do not cry over it. Go up to New York with us, though the wedding gear will not be very ornate. Aunt Aurelia wants her to have a nice outfit in the substantials, and there are some things that will always come in handy. The girls will enjoy it."

Mrs. Lepage had meant to go for the diversion. She was considering a Newport invitation as well. She need not mingle in the gayeties, but she liked to look on. Sherburne House and Beaumanoir were both stupid, with not much besides neighborly hospitalities.

There was another reason why she held aloof. She was not so blind but that she could see her widowhood gave her the opportunity to take Mrs. Stanwood's place in the household, and allow her sister the liberty of the winter, at least. Mrs. Beaumanoir had half suggested it as the proper thing.

She couldn't get along with Dell, she knew, and as

for staying alone—that really would kill her! She had none of the resources of home life; there must be excitement and society all the time. And though she complained, she felt in her soul that Alice's brief engagement was a really excellent thing for her.

It was one of the summer weeks when the heat seemed to have gathered up and spent itself beforehand. There were two or three half cloudy days, and the south wind kept running up the west, sometimes taking a turn quite to the north. There was plenty of room in the city. The hotel was quite inspirited with so large a party, though the Murrays would fain have had them accept their hospitality. Con had taken a tour to Russia, and would not be at home all summer. James had grown into a fine-spirited fellow; quite a young man, indeed.

It was late at night when they reached New York, and they were tired enough to go to bed. But quite soon the next morning, before they had matured their day's plans, Dr. Carew came in.

He was looking very well for all the hard work and hot weather; more than physically well. There was a dignity about him, an intellectual outgrowth, as if he had taken hold of the great things of life; as if his place was and would always be among them. Lyndell could not have put it into concise thought, but she felt it, as if a great distance had grown up between them in a few months.

Millicent crossed the room to meet him and held out her hand with a smile. "I don't know how to thank you," she said, almost under her breath; but the words were like a sound wafted across a lake, and surged up to Dell's silent shore. She seemed even to herself to shrink away, but in another instant he was

greeting everybody in his rich, inspiring voice, giving Alice a delicate recognition that brought the warm color to her cheek, and smiling at Dell. For a moment or two they all talked together. Even Mrs. Lepage thawed out.

"And now," Carew said, when a little calm had succeeded the pleasurable tumult, "what are your plans? Mine will brook no delay. I must beg for Millicent from twelve until two;" he never gave her her married name in the family circle. "I want her to meet a friend of mine at luncheon, who is to sail to-morrow for Europe."

"We have no special plans. If we must spare her, we must," answered Mrs. Stanwood laughingly.

"I wanted to come before they were unalterable. Meanwhile——"

There was another interruption in the form of Mr. Murray, who clasped his daughter to his heart after he greeted the others, and then had a warm, fatherly kiss for Lyndell, who seemed to herself in a maze, as if the real, living spirit had gone out of her and left only the body.

"It is such a magnificent morning, and I have come down in the family carriage," smiling with a fine geniality on the group. "I propose that you all take a drive. The park is well worth seeing. Mrs. Murray went down to Long Island yesterday to make a reconnoissance of our new home, and will not return until to-night, leaving part of the family behind. Doctor, have you time to drive with the ladies?" turning to Carew.

"To my great regret I have not. How long a drive do you propose?" glancing at Millicent.

"I will not go," rejoined she. "It must be busi-

ness before pleasure this time. But I am sorry it happens, and I know the rest will enjoy it."

"But you will go, papa?" inquired Tessy.

"Since Providence designs that I shall not depute the honor to a young man. Your loss is my gain."

Carew laughed and nodded.

"Will you get ready at once?" said Mr. Murray.

"Milly and I will finish a little talk," Carew began, in a low tone to Aunt Julia. "And I will bring her back safely when the feast is ended."

Mrs. Lepage longed to offer her services as a chaperon, but there was no need, and probably they would have been declined. They all went to make themselves ready. Even if there was "no one" in the city, the drive would be more entertaining than staying at home.

They had a carriageful. It was indeed a beautiful morning with a soft, summery air; and as they turned into the winding drives, passing beds of richest bloom and spaces of velvet turf, broken here and there by clumps of shrubbery or a single effective tree, and the array the hand of art had brought to mingle with nature, Tessy asked questions about the new home on Great South Bay, where there would be boating of all kinds. A house and garden to themselves, not very far from the hotel, and in the vicinity of some neighbors; a delightful place, indeed!

"If you would come!" Tessy squeezed Dell's hand. "Oh," with a little cry, "what makes your hand so cold?"

"Is it cold?" Her cheek was hot enough, then.

"You show your yesterday's journey very plainly, Lyndell," remarked Aunt Lepage, with her gift of saying anything that might annoy. "Young people like you should have more stamina."

"Do I?" Dell laughed shortly, and began to talk in an eager fashion that inspired the others, and drew attention away from herself. She did not want to think, and yet back of every effort the thought would remain, the certainty now. Aunt Lepage had put it into words to Aunt Julia as they were going upstairs. Very pointedly indeed she had said:

"It doesn't take much penetration to see through that! I hope Millicent won't be in a hurry, though"—adding with a sharp little intonation: "Haste may be contagious."

Dell was right behind. Aunt Julia made no reply.

She had guessed it, but it seemed her secret, not any certain knowledge. Now a barrier had been set up. There could rightly, honorably, be no trespassing. Had she been dreaming that Alice's surprise might be something that would go farther round the world? The days had come to have a new pleasantness and ease, rudely swept away now with the broken reed on which she had insensibly leaned. Oh, how had she dared? What craze had swept over her. How she had misinterpreted the strong, delightful companionship? Bertram Carew was like his father, he revived everyone who came under his influence. She had not deliberately construed it to mean anything, but had yielded to a meaning unwittingly.

Then, as it was nearing noon, it came out that Mr. Murray had promised Mrs. Fanshawe he would bring the party home to luncheon. There was some demur, but he only laughed in his genial manner, and stopped before the house; sprang down from his seat, and began to assist the ladies out.

Mrs. Lepage had a bored sort of curiosity to see how these parvenus really lived. She rather grudged

the handsome bays and the elegant carriage. Something much plainer would better befit their station.

The long drawing room had been put in summer swathing bands, the curtains and portières were down. Tessy uttered a little exclamation. Mrs. Fanshawe swept down the stairs and made a pretty, gracious sort of apology in the place of the absent mistress. Morna—a tall, beautiful girl, a feminine counterpart of her father—rushed to Tessy's arms, almost overturning her, and then kissed Dell rapturously.

"We missed you so last winter after you had gone," she said breathlessly. "And oh, we thought you were going to keep Tess forever! Isn't Tess the least little mite of a thing! Just like mamma."

"But you are so tall!"

"Yes, I must stop growing now. Only, the new girls *are* tall," laughing in a charming, well-bred fashion.

They were escorted upstairs to the pretty sitting room, where they found everything in admirable order, and all conveniences at hand.

Mrs. Fanshaw was deeply interested in Alice.

"How very little you have changed!" she said. "You look hardly a day over eighteen. Am I to congratulate somebody for the prize he has won? I hope you will be very happy. Mrs. Longworth, I suppose, is having a splendid time. I saw an account of their visiting the Alhambra."

Mrs. Lepage replied with a little hauteur. Her eyes wandered sharply, almost rudely about. There was nothing to criticise. She might have been in the house of one of her chosen friends. If the appointments were not lavish, they were in excellent taste.

"Of course Mrs. Fanshawe has helped civilize these people," she thought to herself, half angrily.

The dining room had not been disturbed. There were flowers enough for a feast, but so perfectly arranged there was no air of overprofusion. The glass, the silver, and china were fine and handsome. There was an air of everyday using about Mr. Murray, a courtesy of the heart and true manhood that easily takes up and adopts the best usages of society. He was as much at ease with Lady Ashton as if he had been reared in the same circle. But there was no pretense, no straining after effect, no disdain of the old simplicities lest people should suspect some humbler origin.

"We might have an afternoon in the stores, just looking about," Aunt Julia said, when they were making ready to go. "To-morrow we must begin in earnest. Tessy, will you have time to join the girls? I know they would like to compare opinions with you."

Tessy colored with pleasure.

"Then you will have to go to the dressmaker's this afternoon," said Mrs. Fanshawe. "She has been very much relieved to have one customer willing to wait. I do not think there is anything to prevent."

So they settled it that way.

They came home at length tired and in a confused state of mind. The afternoon had almost spoiled the morning.

"Aunt Julia," Alice said, "I never shall want these loads and loads of things! You have been extravagant!"

"Oh, you may, sometime. It is Aunt Aurelia's wish."

Millicent had been home a long while, and was bright and rested, entering at once into their pleasure.

"Was your luncheon delightful?" asked Alice,

"Yes, only I wished for one of you. There was a Mr. Southgate, Bertram's friend, and he brought a charming young man who has taken the chair of literature in a California university, and who has written some very fine criticisms—who *is* writing a book," and Milly blushed and smiled. "Mr. Southgate is not young, almost to middle life. Yes, he was very nice and kind."

Then she stopped suddenly and seemed not to want to talk any more about it. But a strange mysterious light kept hovering over her face and touching her eyes with an inward sense of something—joy, satisfaction, perhaps. Did anyone besides Dell note it?

Uncle Stanwood came over in the evening, and teased Alice with a little jolly pleasantry.

"And next it will be Dell's turn," he said.

It brought a bright color to her face, which was succeeded a moment later by paleness.

The main business began the next day. Millicent was as eager and earnest as the girls. She had been deputed by her father to buy some handsome silver, and there was her own gift to consider. Among them all Alice should hardly miss her lost fortune.

There was napery and bed linen. China they meant to eschew, as too troublesome for the long distance. Laces and gowns of simple description, since Alice would not use any brighter colors than lavender and soft grays.

Very fascinating work they found it. Millicent seemed to come out of her abstraction into the sweetness and interest of her own young life. Dell watched with a curious wonder. Was she so happy?

They had a great surprise the following morning when Leonard walked in among them.

"Upon my word!" he said, with the old spoiled-child air. "You look at me as if I was a ghost, and not a blessed ghost, either! I suppose I have no right to intrude upon a women's party, but you might give me a word of welcome!"

"What *has* happened?" gasped Aunt Julia.

"Nothing that I know of. I have come solely for pleasure. I thought you would feel lonely without a man among you."

"But we had Major Stanwood last evening," said Lady Ashton. "And Mr. Murray took us to drive in the park. We have not been lone, lorn women, exactly."

"And Milly had three gentlemen," began Alice, with a glint of mischief.

"You dwarf me into insignificance! My pity for you has been misapplied. I feel *de trop*."

Millicent looked inquiringly at him.

"I might have come if you had not been here," he said, with a suggestion of laughter in his face. "But in my large charity I hoped to take you all in. Dell, do you object to being an object of beneficence?"

"I—it depends," and Lyndell flushed.

"It all came of a notice I saw in a paper. For years I've wanted to see a play or a fantasy, give it whatever name you like—'Midsummer Night's Dream,' and it is here in this very city. Now you have the whole of this strange and moving surprise. If none of you will go with me I must perforce go alone."

"Oh!" cried Dell, in delight. Alice looked her pleasure.

"What a treat!" exclaimed Millicent. "Len, we

will give you a double welcome," and she pressed his hand.

"I thought I should be able to move your obdurate hearts at length," with a soft, triumphant laugh.

"We must send for Uncle Dick," declared Aunt Julia. "And I do wonder if Tessy——"

"Tessy would be wild with delight," said Dell. "She is music mad."

"Then she has not——" Leonard glanced up inquiringly.

"They are all going to-morrow to the south shore of Long Island. Oh, someone ought to fly up there at once——"

"I am going for the tickets. I suppose you do not want a box this warm night? I like balcony seats better. There is no style left in the city to comment upon us. And will someone write a note to Miss Murray? I will be the bearer."

"I will, with pleasure," responded Lyndell.

"And if we could get word to Dr. Carew."

Dell heard the soft voice as she went out of the room to find her writing materials. Yes, it was only natural that Millicent should think of him.

"It would be like hunting a needle in the hay. I dare say he is mewed up in a hospital or gone off with some poor children's excursion, or in the midst of an operation. I have his address somewhere."

"Here are both addresses," said Millicent, handing him a card.

"Let us send a special messenger, then. Milly, write and explain; that's a dear! When I am off on a lark the touch of a pen gives me a chill. While you are doing that I'll count noses and see how many tickets I want,"

"For the whole family?" ejaculated Aunt Julia.

"Exactly! Theaters are not apt to be crowded at this season, so we can all be taken in."

Just as Dell came back with her note Millicent sealed and directed that to Dr. Carew.

"Are you sure you have made all explanations, Lyn-dell, so that the Murrys will not think we have a lunatic in our midst?" Leonard asked gravely. "I may not see her."

"Then you will have to consider when and how we shall meet her. Or you could go up after her in advance."

"The advance guard of the Grand Army—yes," and he laughed as if amused.

"We *were* going out," subjoined Aunt Julia.

"Well, there are some calls I can make, and I will try to put in the weary day somehow. You will see me about five, I think. Adieu."

"What a queer caper!" Mrs. Stanwood said, breaking the silence after Leonard had gone. "Or have I been dreaming?"

"We couldn't all have dreamed just alike," replied Dell mirthfully. "But think how splendid it will be!"

Lady Ashton and Mrs. Lepage decided they would not try the shopping. Aunt Julia went out with the two girls. Dell's heart was so full of delight she felt as if she were treading on air. The day was much warmer, and they had a rather leisurely time.

"I am quite sure we have enough to last a lifetime," said Alice. "You will bankrupt Aunt Aurelia."

"We are almost through now. To-morrow we might venture up to West Point, I think. I will talk to Uncle Dick about it to-night. Lady Ashton is going to start for Toronto, and your mother"—to

Alice—"goes to Newport. So we shall not be like the King of France. Our forty thousand won't march back with us."

"I want to see it all and do all that is needful, but I am longing for the large rooms and the great shady porch at Sherburne," declared Alice.

They were really expeditious to-day. There was no one to cavil or criticise. They went home quite early, and refreshed themselves with a rest. A message had been received from Uncle Dick, and a little later one came from Dr. Carew. Both might be expected.

Leonard was on hand promptly.

"We shall have to go up for Tessy," he said to Dell. "That seemed the best arrangement to make."

Lyndell was nothing loath. Leonard was in a delightful brotherly mood. Tessy was all eagerness. Her eyes had a soft, starry look, and her cheek the tint of a peach. Dell thought she had hardly ever seen her so lovely.

The seats were in two rows, so that the party would be nearer together. Leonard and the two girls came first. He put Tessy in the last seat, himself next, and then Dell. There were two more and four right behind them. Milly came in next to Dell; the elders had the other seats.

The setting of the play was exquisite, the music enchanting. The delicate merriment, the dancing, the spell of love that transformed the lovers themselves, the dainty songs moved them all. Leonard Beaumanoir had shut off Tessy—was it by design, that no one could watch the blossoming of the primrose face? He was so tall he shielded her from any chance curious glance. As for Dell, she forgot everything. She did

not want to look at Millicent, she could feel the joy in her face. The delicious music and the story moved her immeasurably. She would have rejoiced to go to some far fairyland.

They came out in the foyer. Leonard looked at his watch, and considered.

"I take the midnight train," he said. "I will have just time to escort Miss Murray home, so I will say good-by. You will see me at Sherburne House soon."

"I've been enchanted," declared Carew. "A thousand thanks for your thought, Len."

"Take charge of Dell. Good-by, everybody."

Tessy's farewells were of necessity brief, but they were comforted by promises of letters.

Bertram slipped Dell's hand through his arm as they threaded their way to the car. At the entrance to their hotel he left them.

Mrs. Lepage would not go to West Point. The girls were eager to see Archie, who was a fine manly lad, and looked every inch a soldier in his regimentals; who had some special indulgences this day on account of his father's standing. His mother had written to him about Alice, and she seemed to have a new and sacred quality in his eyes. "But I am glad you are not engaged; you really are not?" he questioned Dell eagerly. "Next year I shall be through this horrid grind, and I want you to come up to the grand ball. And I mean to have one splendid visit at Sherburne. Oh, Cousin Dell! I hope you won't be married by that time."

"I shall not be married by that time," repeated Dell confidently. "Perhaps not in a long time."

"Do you remember the summer at Gardiner's? You have changed so much; yet you have the same

brown eyes, with their infinite capacity of merriment and sadness. What a summer it was, and how many changes! I should like to go back to childhood again. Dell, you *are* happy now? You have won the right, surely!"

"I have been very happy," she said. "And I hope to make you all welcome at Sherburne House for many a long year to come"

"I don't think there will ever be anyone quite noble enough for you to marry. And yet I should hate to have you stay single."

He flushed at his own speech. She colored, too, and then laughed nervously.

"Next April I shall be twenty-one, and come into my kingdom. Not that it will make any difference. I have come into so many good things, so much love among you all. I must begin to make returns."

"Oh, Dell! you have made the returns. You have been the bravest——"

"Oh, hush!" she cried. "I am trying to do my duty in the place God has put me. I often fall short. I make mistakes."

"It is the other life that has the promise of being free from them."

The day seemed too short. Archie hated to let them go. But the sail down the river in the late afternoon was enchanting.

They said good-by to Lady Ashton with regret and a hope of having her back again presently. Mrs. Lepage had a headache and declared she did not feel at all like going to Newport, but she went nevertheless.

The four left turned their faces homeward. The week had been crowded full, and they were tired.

But Millicent had some new charm, an exquisite satisfaction that lighted up her face.

How many times in the years to come Dell would listen to love stories, and read the blessedness by some more subtle wordless language! But she would never have any of her own, she said, with the unreason of youth. She would be Miss Sherburne of Sherburne House.

CHAPTER X.

A CONFIDENCE.

LYNDELL was swinging in the hammock this drowsy summer afternoon, while Nature's orchestra, tuned to a minor key, was chording in sweet improvisations. She was fond of music with "no set tune," as she called it. Sometimes melodies ran through her brain; seemed so near, so perfect, that she could transcribe them. But though she picked out the air, the blended harmonies came far short of her vague illusions. So, when poetry stirred her and set every nerve athrill, it seemed as if she might disentangle the floating sweetness and set it to words. What was the marvelous gift called genius? Was she hopelessly commonplace? And yet everything moved her so.

Sooner or later she seemed thrust aside in other matters. Was there some fatal lack in her? She was beginning a course of introspection, a disease common to youth when dreams have fallen in the background.

Something brought the failure home to her this afternoon. She had been very near to Alice since the visit at Trenholme Court and the beautiful summer together. Nearer still in the sorrow, and oh! so near in the delicious joy that had fallen out of the heavens, as it were, out of the very hands of a smiling Providence. Yet as soon as they returned to Sherburne House Violet had taken possession of her. Such

consultations over wedding gear, such speculations about the future! Where Alice was timid, Violet brought out her wider experience. Dell, of course, had never been in love, and knew nothing about it, said these radiant young women.

Alice blossomed royally in this new atmosphere. Dell *was* jealous. She never waited for people to push her out, she always stepped aside. She would not ask for anything not freely given. She was not quick to right the disturbed atoms about her when they touched anything belonging to her in an appropriate sense.

They had only been home a week, yet these two girls were the center of everything. The sewing room at Sherburne was full to overflowing. Cassy and a young handmaiden were making piles of sheets and pillow-slips, hemming tablecloths, overcasting the fringed towels; marking, folding, and laying aside in the nice clean packing boxes.

"It is best to have all these things out of the way," said orderly, far-sighted Aunt Aurelia, who was taking such an interest that she almost grew young again.

What was left for her, Lyndell? What would be left for her when they went away?

She and Tessy had been taken with a post-educational spasm in the winter. They conversed in French, they read some heavy German that almost quenched Tessy's ardor, some light Italian that they had a misgiving would be of little service.

"I shouldn't care ever to live abroad in a foreign country," Tessy said. "If I should marry," and the sweet face flushed exquisitely, "I'd like a lovely big country house with lots of ground, and just such a houseful of children as mamma has had. And though

it is nice to know these wonderful things, and all about electricity and the sciences—it doesn't seem a real woman's life, with love and all the sweet things in it."

"But we ought not forget what we have learned," Dell returned emphatically.

However, pleasures had interfered. Then there would be the quiet weeks at Sherburne. Nothing much had come of that, with the excitement and surprise of a lover and much going to and fro.

And now, when Dell was not needed in the confidences, she returned to her more solid pursuits. She had been trying to fix her mind on a volume of philosophy, but the soft voices up above kept purling like a pleasant brook "in the leafy month of June," and abstruse theories were mingled with overmuch bliss. So she had taken to the hammock in disgust. She was thinking a little of the years to come. They did not look as bright as they used. Was it because the decade of girlhood was almost gone? Did people grow graver when they had passed one-and-twenty? These two girls upstairs were past that, and were sipping their cup of nectar, and one had some bitterness first.

There was a little rustle, and a light step on the walk. Dell raised her head. Although in white, it was no ghost; but Millicent von Lindorm—beautiful, sweet, and gracious, a rare vision of content. Was Milly ever restless and questioning? But then everything came to her. Yes, and a poignant sorrow, also. Joy was interspersed.

Dell turned suddenly and brought her feet to the ground; would have risen, but Milly put out her hand.

"Let me come and sit here," she said. "You have

no other seat except the rustic bench so far away that if I whispered a secret the reeds and the grass would surely hear."

She kissed Dell on the forehead, and seated herself beside her. Then they swung slowly to and fro in the fragrant air, pungent with the scent of pines distilled by the sunshine.

"The girls are upstairs," Dell said, a moment later. "And Aunt Aurelia and Aunt Jue."

"But I came to see you." Millicent smiled across to the rather grave face. Her own seemed transfigured by some rare light—was it happiness? An inward coldness like a protest swept over the girl.

"Dell," said the soft, clear, tender voice that in spite of resistance found its way to the younger heart, "our friendship seems to have spaces of a curious kind of delay or waiting in it. Is it because of the many things that come between? But one person can never quite fill another's life. I suppose God set it that way lest we might grow too narrow and selfish. Husbands and wives do sometimes."

"Yes." There was a sound of dissatisfaction in the young voice, of seeming regret that it should be thus.

"I am older and have 'supped of sorrow.' I used to feel that it was not right to shadow your youth or Violet's. Mamma and I took great comfort together. And in my solitary hours a new, wonderful knowledge grew up within me; an inspiration that I hardly dared believe in at first!"

If they were anywhere else! Lyndell Sherburne thought. If some friendly shade or darkness would hide her face until "this storm was overpast!"

"Something so delightful that at first I gloated over

the sweet knowledge. Yes, I really did. And quite by accident another person found it out, and what shall I say?—guided me, advised me, really took me in hand," and she laughed softly. "He knew so much more about the greater world than I."

Dell let her head droop a little toward Millicent's shoulder, and the other put her disengaged arm around the girl's neck. She was safer so. She felt the inward chill had taken all the color from her face. Where was her heroism in this strait?

"When it was a fact, I wanted to tell you—to show you. But papa had a curious feeling about it. He thought I might be mistaken, or that it might not amount to much. We are outgrowing the old-fashioned notions about women, but he clings to them."

Yes, Dell understood Milly's second marriage so soon would strike hard against Uncle Beaumanoir's notions of propriety.

"Why, Dell, you are not a bit curious? Have you lost interest in me?" She tried with her shoulder to turn the face a little. "Have I hurt you by my reticence? But you went to New York, and Miss Murray came down here, and you and Alice have been such friends. Perhaps I feel older than I really am. And yet I don't want to lose you, dear. I should like to think you cared and would rejoice with me."

"Yes, I do, I shall," said the half smothered voice.

"But you don't know," somewhat puzzled, "unless Bertram told you."

"No," returned Dell, a little more firmly. "But you two had so much business together."

She braced herself for the confession. Yes, she *had* suspected it. She should have settled her mind to the fact instead of allowing herself vague fantasies.

"Do you care to hear?" The voice was low, entreating.

"Oh, yes, yes!" Dell raised her face of her own accord and kissed Millicent with a passionate anguish, but the pain was known only to herself.

"You have a right to feel a little hurt," said Millicent gravely. "We were going to be such friends. Dell, I was at fault in the other annoyance, about Leonard," and she flushed. "I have been at fault now, but it was partly circumstances, and I thought you were so occupied by other matters. It was engrossing, too, to live my little romance to myself. It began long ago, in the sorrow. There were nights when an awful sense of loneliness would sweep over me. I used to put out my hand and fancy I could clasp Emil's, and be comforted."

There was a pause. And she could overlive this! Dell thought with a secret indignation.

"When I was a girl at school I used to write verses. One of the teachers set a little song to music. But I had a feeling that a true poet was something grand and high, quite above ordinary mortals. I was having a young girl's good, happy time, and sighed for nothing more. But in these hours of solitary thought the gift came to me, took possession of me. I wrote verses to Emil—I could not help it, and then it comforted me so."

"Oh, Milly!" Dell's heart was touched by a strain of love and penitence. She wanted to kneel to her.

"Last summer, when Bertram was here—father feels toward him almost as if he were a son, he thinks he owes so much of Leonard's restoration to him, and he is quite as proud as the doctor of Bertram's suc-

cess. He is going to be such a grand, many-sided man, who will gather in rich knowledges and deal them out again with generous hands. He finds some time for intellectual society. He has written some able essays with new broad views, and has made many delightful friends. He is really one of the coming men."

There was a gratified delight in Millicent's tone.

"Well, last summer—I must at least get to the beginning," and she gave Dell a tender pressure of the arm, "it came out in a very odd fashion. Nora had been in my room making havoc of my affairs and gone out armed with them. Bertram met her in the walk, and captured her and the spoils. There was no one around, I think, and as he suspected and was very eager to know," laughing and blushing rather nervously, "we read over some of the verses together, and I confessed to a story. We had a long talk about using our gifts, and woman's work in the world, and all that, and he urged me to make a trial in earnest. He took two of the poems up to the city with him, and oh, Dell! they were accepted and considered not only worthy of a check, but a very high compliment as well. I had not whispered a word to anyone, but then I told papa."

Millicent gave a sigh in the pause.

"And he was delighted," interposed Dell.

"No, he was not *quite* delighted, though he admitted one of the poems brought tears to his eyes. When I told him, I had sent Bertram another poem and a pathetic little local story, and these saw the light also. But papa was afraid of many things. He has an old-fashioned prejudice against literary women, and so dislikes their lives being made public property.

I think, too, he has a little fear that they will cease to be domestic and long for notice and notoriety. And then one may be a favorite to-day, and next year almost forgotten. It tends to keep one in a state of feverish expectancy and too often ends in disappointment. No, he wasn't enthusiastic at all. I thought I would give it up to please him. But it did seem to take the second hope of my life. I did not think it had become so much to me. And presently he said he would not object if I would keep it a secret from everyone but Bertram until I was certain. I believe his yielding was partly mamma's influence. The lives of girls and women are changing and broadening out, whether for good or ill. And Bert said pithily that when God gave a man or a woman a genius for cooking or teaching school, no one made any objection to their using it; and when he gave either of them a higher genius there was no reason why the woman should bury her talent and the man use his!"

"Oh, Milly, Milly!" Dell was sobbing on her neck. There was such a great revulsion of feeling.

"My dear cousin, it ought not to excite you so. You are trembling like a leaf." Millicent was amazed.

Dell laughed with a short, hysterical sound. "It is not that altogether, Milly. I've been foolish all day, just as if I wanted a good excuse for crying. And now it is all over, a sun shower. Oh, Milly, how delightful it must be! I could find it in my heart to envy you. Sometimes I hardly know what to do with myself. And Bertram's friends that you met in New York——"

"There is quite a story about that. Mr. Southgate, it appears, is a very well-known literary man with a kindly heart, and Bert thinks an excellent judgment,

He has helped a good many young writers with his counsel, but when he does not see a promise worth while, he does not hesitate to say so. Bert took my long story to him. It is rather peculiar, with part of the scene laid abroad, and some artistic life in it."

Millicent made a pause.

"Oh, don't say that he discouraged you!" cried Dell, in a tone of entreaty.

"No. We had some correspondence about it. He thought it too brief, almost abrupt in some parts, and told me a good deal about style and mistakes young writers fell into until they became positive faults. It was such a delightful letter, so full of wise counsel. Some day I must let you see it. And when I thanked him for it that day at the luncheon, and wondered how he could find time in his busy life to take so much pains with others, he laughed and said he only did it with those who gave promise of being worth the trouble. But the gist of the letter lay in the fact that he asked me to rewrite the story entirely, following his suggestions, and then send it to him. And this is what has kept me so engrossed. I think I must have seemed strange to you. Some days I was like another person to myself."

"Yes, you have!" Dell looked up with shining eyes. In her generous enthusiasm she was one gleam of delight. "And then?" she questioned.

"I knew, when Mr. Southgate had read it half through, he was greatly pleased. He wrote a kindly note, that the delay might not seem disheartening to me. And it is to go through a magazine at the beginning of the new year; then be issued in book form. Bertram asked me to come up to New York and meet him before he sailed, hence the luncheon

on so short a notice. Did it seem mysterious to you?"

"It is all so strange, so wonderful!" Dell leaped out of the hammock and stood before her, taking both hands in hers to steady the violent motion, and then kissed her rapturously. "It is another romance with its patient waiting. Oh, Milly, I am so glad! Yes, I was a little hurt sometimes." Yet she smiled with a happy intensity that gave her face its brightest expression.

"I wanted to tell you so much that I was afraid if I began any explanation I would only make a mystifying blunder. And I was so engrossed, so fascinated! I don't wonder papa was afraid of the danger of my getting too absorbed. But there will never be anything just like it again. I wanted so to satisfy Bertram's friend when he had been so extremely kind. Then all you girls were so busy and so taken up with each other, and lovers, and all."

Dell kept looking at her steadily, as if fascinated.

"Little cousin, you will forgive my seeming neglect?"

"Little!" Dell laughed at that, and drew herself up to her fullest height. "Oh, Milly! there are no words to congratulate you! If I was going to wish for one gift above all others it would be that. A picture is only seen by a few, comparatively, but a book that goes everywhere, that has something to say to so many people——"

"Pray that I may always have the power and the desire to say it rightly. Papa spoke of this—that one might do a great deal of false teaching, be tempted into dangerous by-paths. Yet we sometimes have to live through dangers and temptations and doubts. If

the stories were not lived there never could be any written."

"But the strangeness of it! That it should be one of us!" and Dell kept looking out of surprised eyes. "I couldn't write any verses worth reading. I have tried. I simply can't do anything!" she cried, in half despair.

"Your presence and courage saved the children in the boat that summer day long ago. And you made Gifford's rescue possible; yes, you really saved him. And you won us all when we stood coldly aside. Dell, Dell! you have been living stories right along. And your loyalty to the Murrays converted Aunt Aurelia. Many a little girl, coming into a new life, might have forgotten or cast off her old friends. I think, too, you have had an influence on Leonard. I sometimes hear him quote you. And though we felt dreadfully disappointed over the untoward turn of affairs last summer, I shall feel that he is a better and more manly man to-day than if you had weakly condoned his fault."

Dell's face flushed to its utmost capacity.

"And now, dear, I trust you to keep my secret. I think papa feels afraid of criticisms and all that, and is rather nervous about having it known unless the story should be well received. But so many beautiful stories have been written that perhaps no one can be the best in every person's judgment. It is like beauty, and the one woman who would capture the world if tastes were just alike."

"I am very proud of your confidence, Millicent," Dell said gravely. "I shall respect it to the uttermost."

"I knew you would. Shall we go up and see the

girls now? Mamma and papa will be over to tea. Next week Mr. Amory is coming, and the final arrangements are to be made. Dell, dear, we must be a great deal to each other this winter."

Aunt Aurelia was coming out on the porch. They stopped and talked to her. Would she be surprised at a genius in the family, Dell wondered.

The carriage drove up. Milly took her mother's bonnet and shawl, an old-fashioned crape that she nearly always put in for a little protection if the night air blew up fresh.

"We have been packing," announced Violet. "Look at those lovely piles. It almost makes me wish I was going to housekeeping. Isn't it just splendid to look after these things yourself? When I am abroad and very homesick, I shall get some of the old novels and read about Miss Betty hemming her tablecloths, or Miss Mary doing the long overseam in sheets. It is romantic, but we have wide muslin and a sewing machine."

"Girls," said Aunt Julia, looking in, "I am afraid you will ruin your constitutions by such close application."

They laughed at that, and begged her to come and inspect the beautiful marking. Presently they all went down and had a gay chat on the porch. After supper they had a delightful time, singing.

"How we shall miss them!" Mr. Beaumanoir said. "I hope another family will grow up here at Sherburne to have just as good times."

Then he gave a soft sigh. If it was God's will the old prayer should be answered!

"You will come over to-morrow?" Milly said, with her good-night kiss to Dell.

Alice had a long, long letter to brood over that had come in the evening's mail. Floyd was restless and a little feverish, so Aunt Julia sat by him. Dell was alone, out on the step of the porch, looking at Millicent's confidence of the afternoon, as if it were a spirit robed in the soft shimmer of the twilight.

True, it had not brought her a certainty. She was glad of that. She wanted a little more time to adjust herself. Did she really care so much for Bertram Carew?

She must have it out some time with her own soul. For if she cared in any covetous, desiring way, it was a feeling to be uprooted. The girlhood that was glad and friendly and ready to take all good things, such a little while ago, had vanished. She was a woman, and the woman's knowledges and demands startled her. The nearness was not enough. She wanted to share great thoughts and high purposes, the questions that were stirring and awakening the world, with someone strong enough to guide, who would help her to discern the truths that floated vaguely through her brain. Someone to uplift and strengthen, to point out paths where she could do real work, not fritter her years in purposeless efforts, nor trifling everyday pleasures. If God had implanted this yearning and desire in her heart, did he mean she should strive against it and crush it out?

Twenty years! That, surely, was enough for childish, girlish gratifications; for purely youthful delights. There were beautiful untried years looming up before her, and she wanted to put something worthy in them, not the mere everyday things. She had felt herself stirred and kindled by the depth and width and blessedness of higher use. She wanted to draw from

every day its grand measure and fullness, and she could not do it by herself. She wanted to be lifted into this higher atmosphere, and she knew who had the power to do it. Why not for her as well as another? That other had so many uplifting gifts in her own soul.

Alice's ideals of life had come to her. Strength and manliness and tender love to rest in—to be so enfolded she should desire nothing from without. It had stirred this other heart long before, a blessed gift on the way for her acceptance, when another had raised a finger and turned it almost aside; yet God had been keeping watch and ward.

A vaguely comprehended sense of a lifetime loss swept over her. In these first protesting moments she felt as if she must strive to recover it. Of what use? Milly was armed with her beauty, her infinite grace, her genius. Her experiences had shaped and ripened her. Dell felt she had hardly emerged from the crudeness of girlhood. A mortifying sense stole over her.

Had God any plans for her life? How was she to know them? Hope or joy fulfilled, or merely quiet acquiescence? A reflected ray, perhaps, from other lives, warm with love and nearness; but would that be all? She had once enthusiastically believed it was her duty, and would be her pleasure, to restore the hope about Sherburne. Her cheek burned now as she recalled the calm certainty of her loving, of the great mistake she had not been allowed to make. If people were kept from such things, might not the other things kept from them be not just what was needed? She did not want to answer the question, but shrank back in dismay. The wound was too recent.

But there was a clear obligation before her: She

could not go on dreaming and desiring what would never be hers. For it seemed as if she had discerned the unerring relation of events, the harmonies that had evolved a little in the beginning, been checked, and then in God's own providence gone on again. She asked with a reverent wonder if Millicent would choose Emil von Lindorm now, knowing her own powers better?

In all this there was a strong and beautiful friendship for her. Bertram had continued his father's interest in her; nay, a wider one, because he was more conversant with the larger needs and purposes. They would draw her into that fascinating life with so much gentleness that no one could object. But could she take her place beside them? Oh, not now! while the sense of loss was so bitter.

Could she blame herself for seeing just what she wanted?

It did come to people in this world. It had come to Alice. One could not help the lightning glimpse. But it must be put away, lest it led to envying and coveting, which was quite possible with her strong nature. She could not tell how she knew it, but she did know in her soul that resignation would come easier to Millicent.

"Are you here all alone?" asked Aunt Julia, in her fond, rich tone, that seemed to carry comfort.

Dell sprang up. The reverie was going around in a circle. The pain was too new to be brooded over in this fashion. She put her arm around her aunt's neck, and pressed her cheek against the other.

"I am glad it is not quite your time for love affairs," the elder said, with a soft laugh. "We couldn't spare all our girls."

A new thought came to Lyndell Sherburne. If she chose some such destiny as her desire prefigured, she must go away from Sherburne House.

"And you are glad to keep me a little longer?"

"Glad! I think you are just coming to the appreciation of everything. The years from twenty to twenty-five are really the richest in a girl's life, unless she is overanxious about marrying, and that you need not be. But I hope, Dell, that you will marry happily. The old platitude about it rounding out a woman's life is most true. Wifehood and motherhood are among the blessed gifts of God. It makes us understand the mystery and the richness of the world to come."

"But suppose, Aunt Jue,"—Dell hesitated,—“suppose a woman never met her ideal. Would something lower satisfy her all along, do you think?"

"A girl's ideal is apt to be very strongly idealized. That leads to so many mistaken marriages. And in the years after twenty you go down more to the real heart of things, the worth, the qualities that dominate a man. For he changes and improves as well, or else degenerates. There is no standing still. Human nature wasn't meant for that."

"But if a woman did not meet anyone, did not care to marry," Dell ventured. "Aunt Aurelia——"

"Aunt Aurelia was a good deal admired in her young days, and, report says, rather haughty with her lovers. But she had duties as a daughter, and motherhood came to her—we all needed her. Yet something has been missed out of her life. Do not take her for a pattern, my dear. We shall all be disappointed, if you do. Are you wearied with the overflowing fondness of these two girls?" and Aunt Julia

laughed, with a softened sense of humor. "Sometimes, in the grave after-days, the remembered foolish sweetness comes back like the glimpse of sunshine at the close of a cloudy afternoon. It is not to be despised."

"Oh, no! I am not tired of them. I shall hate to have them go; only they will be very happy."

"As you will be when your time of love comes."

Aunt Julia kissed her fondly. Dell kept down the cry that rose in her heart. She did not want anyone to wish her happiness. She was young enough to think mental suffering brave, and she meant to endure in silence. Besides, she would be ashamed to have anyone know that she had almost given her heart unasked. She was not really in love, but she could have loved truly, enthusiastically, if it had been asked of her.

There was nothing to put in its place—she wanted to fix this fact firmly in her mind—only living right straight along in the next things. Aunt Aurelia was almost fifty years older than herself. Would she be better or worse when forty-seven years, to be exact, had come and gone? There were no daughterly duties for her; there would be so few children left. Ah, was Sherburne House to lose its old delightful prestige in her hands?

CHAPTER XI.

THE FLIGHT OF A BIRDLING.

“OH, Aunt Julia!” Dell cried, with three or four letters in her hand. “Come and tell me what had better be done. I am quite at sea.”

Tessy had begged her to come to them on South Bay. Lady Ashton wondered if one or two or three of them could not be expressed to Canada, and visit Quebec and Montreal, and go up the St. Lawrence, taking the journey home by water.

“What next?” asked Aunt Julia laughingly. “A trip to the moon, or the furthestmost isles of the sea?”

“Nothing, really, for me. Yes—to go to Philadelphia.”

“Oh, Lyndell! has anything happened with that foolish girl?”

The tone changed to one of distress, and she came out to Dell, who was on the porch reading her letters.

“Yes, something has happened, but it is wonderful. Perhaps the best; Mrs. Weir thinks so.”

“Is she going to be safely married?”

“Oh, Aunt Jue, *is* that your remedy for every difficulty under the sun?” laughed Dell. “No, it is not marriage, but it seems a case of falling in love. And a splendid opportunity, such as may never happen again. Read Mrs. Weir’s letter.”

Mrs. Stanwood seated herself on the step. Dell went over the queer, snatchy epistle of Anita Garcia,

who begged that she might be allowed to accept, as if Lyndell Sherburne was the sole arbiter of her destiny, and expressed here and there such a wild adoration, unlike her precise, formal little epistles, that Dell was amazed.

Mrs. Weir's letter was concise and to the point. She premised that she had the highest confidence in Miss Waring's judgment, or she should not have allowed her to take charge of Miss Garcia, though they were excellent friends. Miss Waring was past thirty, and of a severely practical tendency. They had gone to a quiet little town in Maine, where but few boarders found their way. But among the few this summer had been quite a noted singer, little known by her husband's name, as she had won most of her triumphs under that of her girlhood. She had heard Miss Garcia sing in the little country church, and sought her out in a friendly manner, offering her a few lessons, and taking a kindly, apparently casual, interest in her, until assured that the girl really gave great promise. Then she had questioned Miss Waring about her and been referred to Mrs. Weir. That lady had been surprised by a visit from a personage so well known as Mme. Barry proved to be.

Out of this had grown an offer quite too good, Mrs. Weir thought, to decline. Mme. Barry proposed to take Miss Garcia for the next five years, as a pupil and almost younger sister. During that time she was to have complete control of her training, and whatever public singing was considered best for her. There was no question but that she would excel in operatic music, for she seemed a born actress in facility of expression; in the depth and intensity of her feeling; in the impassioned face, with its varied emotional capac-

ity. After that period she would be capable of making her way with the world, of commanding a position.

Mrs. Weir had seen both Mme. Barry and her husband several times. There could be no doubt of their earnestness and sincerity. Miss Garcia had returned to Philadelphia, and now only the sanction of her friends at Sherburne House was needed.

"I do not see what objection there can be," said Mrs. Stanwood, after perusing the letter a second time. "Mme. Barry is so well known, and if Mrs. Weir, with her wide experience of people, approves——"

Truth to tell, a great burden seemed lifted. Mrs. Stanwood had often pondered the future of this girl so curiously linked with Dell. And five years' absence! Everybody would have forgotten about her by that time. It was the best thing that could happen to Dell; a perfect relief.

"Why, no; there can be no objection," repeated Dell, almost staring at Aunt Julia. "And isn't it splendid?"

"She wants to go, of course?"

"Yes. She is enchanted with Mme. Barry." Dell sighed. She was curiously jealous.

"You will go, of course. You seem her self-appointed guardian, though I do not see any real power that belongs to you. But you cannot go alone."

"Then you must come with me. I should be afraid to take such an important step with no one to keep me in countenance."

"Yes, and it may as well be settled as soon as possible. It is a very fortunate thing."

"She can sing like a bird. It *is* a wonderful gift."

Dell seemed to see her again as she stood on the station platform that morning, more than a year ago. She was a little hurt by the lack of something, not quite gratitude, but preference, affection. And the more subtle, underlying question haunted her. Had Anita really ceased to care for Leonard?

"We can go to-morrow," began practical Aunt Jue, anxious to have the business settled. "It is not worth while to make any explanations; I will tell Aunt Aurelia."

"But the doctor and Miss Neale will be so glad," said Dell, with a lingering inflection.

"Oh, yes! you can tell them afterward. And Uncle Beaumanoir. They will all rejoice over Miss Garcia's good fortune."

She laid the letter back in Dell's lap. She had a desire to know what was in Anita's, but Dell did not proffer it.

"Now I must go and put matters in train."

Dell still sat there, embowered in the green gloom. She desired and yet dreaded the meeting. She had never been quite sure that her verdict would be cheerfully accepted by Anita. How strange that lives were so intermingled; that one came into yours almost from the ends of the earth, and went out again with scarcely a ripple! The sting was in that. One was hoping for a great influence, hoping to do some real good—toiling all night, perhaps, in the boat, in the darkness and uncertainty, and taking nothing. Yet this work had been brought to her door—she was quite sure of that.

Someone, later on, might have discovered the beautiful voice. But, meanwhile, what would have happened?

Aunt Aurelia spoke of it in a relieved yet kindly manner. But she and Aunt Jue had quite a rejoicing by themselves.

"Aunt Aurelia," and Dell smiled with a rather forlorn attempt at mirthfulness, "we do not seem to have much success adopting people, do we? Just as soon as we have everything planned out for the comfort of our declining days, lovers and fortunes and opportunities come to hand. We shall have to grow old together."

Miss Sherburne glanced up into the radiant face, that seemed as if it could never grow old, and smiled. Dell stooped and kissed her. But would she feel satisfied to grow old in this fashion, when she was so dissatisfied with her twenty years?

Alice wondered why they should rush off to Philadelphia in the summer heat. It was a tiresome journey, but a lovely shower came up in the afternoon and brought a beneficent coolness.

It was late, but Mrs. Weir had come herself to meet them, and insisted upon her hospitality. Dell was delighted to see her, and thanked her again and again for her kindly interest in Miss Garcia.

"She was a little troublesome for the first two months. She had never been used to any sort of discipline. But when she found that she was really capable of doing something, I never saw a more tractable girl. Do you know anything about her family?" Mrs. Weir asked.

"Dr. Carew found her story true in every respect. But her mother had been dead for years, and this maid, who might have known, was dead also," replied Mrs. Stanwood.

"It is well to be certain that no unsatisfactory rela-

tives can come to hand just when her career is most promising. Mme. Barry wanted to be assured positively of this. More than one person has been beset by an adroit swindler pretending to be a relative."

"One can be quite sure in this case, I think."

"Madame is deeply interested in her, and Miss Garcia has found a friend worth having. Her fortune is assured unless she should lose her voice, which seems hardly possible."

They were very tired, and it was deemed advisable not to add the excitement of an interview. But Dell wondered a little.

She was barely dressed the next morning when a fleet step skimmed along the hardwood floor, and there was a dainty, hesitating tap.

She opened the door. But for the radiance transfiguring the face, Anita Garcia had hardly changed. She looked no older, she had the same *petite*, elusive figure, full of curves and subtle turns. Her complexion was a little fairer, perhaps; but there was the same Oriental suggestion of duskiness, and some foreign look, perhaps Spanish.

"Oh, Miss Sherburne!" she cried. Then she knelt and clasped her arms about Dell, burying her face in the soft gown.

Dell raised her—she was so like a little child. Her face was one deep, tremulous flush. The curious fondness woke afresh in Lyndell, as she kissed the throbbing lips.

"You will let me go?" Anita cried, with almost a sob in her voice. "You will let me go?"

"Don't you know that I haven't any right; that I could not dictate what you shall do?" The old hurt feeling came back.

"You have the only right, dear Miss Sherburne. There is no one else to say a word. I have no relatives, nobody. I don't mean permission, merely. I am almost as old as you, nineteen. You wished once that I were your sister. I want you to give me just that sort of Godspeed; to care that I shall succeed, to be proud of me when I grow famous—as I shall! I feel it all in me! If I could have gone wishing all over the world, I couldn't have thought of anything like this opportunity."

"I do wish you the best of good fortune. And I *am* delighted." Dell studied her with a feeling of mystery, as if she would never be able to understand her, to fathom the subtle depths. "You are happy?" she ventured.

A quick dazzle went over Anita's face.

"Miss Sherburne, I once thought only one thing in the world could make me happy. When I found that wrested away from me—no, when I found it had never really been mine—it was as if the world had been swept away. There were many experiences in those weeks at Sherburne. I *did* try to steel my heart against you. And even now, circumstances may shut me out of your life. But I have a clearer appreciation of how you saved me, and how you have made these splendid events possible. I want to get down on my knees and cry out my gratitude."

"And not love!" Lyndell could not restrain the cry.

"Oh, I can dare to love you now. Perhaps it won't matter very much to anyone, or take anything from them. I *was* afraid. And if you thought me hardly worth so much love, you could understand another person's passing fancy, and that when it was over noth-

ing at all was left—nothing. I was foolish enough to half believe *he* would come——”

“And if he had?” It was a crucial moment for Lyndell. Her very breath seemed to stop.

“I did wish he had!” There was a delicate vindictiveness in her tone as she raised her head proudly, her eyes alight with scorn. “After what he had once said, I should have known the value of any new protestations. I should have despised him. Perhaps I come of a revengeful race. I will confess all my littleness to you. I am learning some better lessons. It is so different when you are really taught in childhood. And now, Miss Sherburne, I am glad for his sake and mine that he did not come. I honor him for his truth-telling, hard as it seemed then. And I find that other people make these mistakes. I am not the only one.”

Lyndell flushed with a secret knowledge.

Anita laughed softly, musically. “All that seems in some other life. To-day I would not take that, and give up my music, and the chance of a fame like Mme. Barry’s. I feel as if that was my crude chrysalis state, and all the gorgeous colors of the butterfly are within my reach. That is vanity, perhaps, but power as well. I sang in the little church that day, and a tall, gracious, lovely woman looked at me. I saw the surprise, the pleasure, the almost incredulity in her eyes, and then I sang just to her. There are triumphs like that in store for me. And I would rather have them than any man’s love who would want me to sit by the fireside and sing to him alone. You are more generous than that.”

Anita Garcia looked curiously beautiful at that instant. Her varying expressions gave an indication

of what the face might be when interpreting any emotion. She could make it hers at the moment. No; having had a taste of the world's applause, she would not rest until she had quaffed all there was. Lyndell could not imagine such a nature satisfied with a quiet little round. If she had never dreamed of any other—but would not the temptation have come some time?

"I want to ask one great thing of you," Anita began beseechingly. "Do not be angry. We can be friends, better friends, because no one will ever suspect me of any ulterior motive. I said once that I should repay the money you have spent on me——"

"Oh, Anita! No, I shall not consent!" Dell interrupted, with emphasis.

"Hear me through. In these five years I am going to work for Mme. Barry. She advances me this small sum. I told her of your goodness, and she quite agrees with me. I shall no longer be a pensioner on your charity. If you ask me to be friends with you, if you care to hear of my improvement, of any triumphs that come to me, I shall be glad, proud to have so dear and interested a friend. Somewhere in the future the social lines may draw nearer."

"But you might take it as a gift," she pleaded, clasping Anita's dainty hand.

"You shall give me anything, after the debt is paid. I want you and yours to feel that if I came among you in an unfortunate manner, I have done my best to relieve you of a burden, and myself of an obligation. As for your good doctor, who took such care of me—was I quite a fiend through that time?—and Sherburne House, whose lovely doors were opened to me by the generous hand of its young mistress, such beneficences

can never be repaid. Their influence has changed my life. Oh, do you suppose I shall ever forget what I owe you?"

Her eyes were lustrous with tears.

Lyndell was silent. She understood the fine pride that dictated this course. For years Anita would take herself out of their lives. There would be no tie connecting them, save that of friendly intimacy as *she* chose.

She watched Anita with curious interest as they went down to breakfast. She met Mrs. Stanwood with a quiet grace that savored of fine breeding, and was dignified as well. Afterward she sang for them, and Dell was amazed at her improvement. Her voice was a lovely mezzo-soprano, with a birdlike clearness in the upper notes, a melody that lingered after the sound ceased.

At eleven Mme. Barry and her husband were announced. Mrs. Stanwood said briefly, in explaining Anita's sudden appearance among them, that her nurse had sent her North, hoping she would find the friends who had been in Florida a winter or two before. But no one had any real claim upon her. It had been a fancy of her niece, Miss Sherburne—inclining her head toward Dell—that Miss Garcia's voice was unusual and worth cultivating; and with this in view she had been sent to Mrs. Weir's, to whom they were all greatly indebted.

"She made only one condition," said Mme. Barry, smiling over at Dell; "that I should reimburse Miss Sherburne for the year's expenses."

"And I refused to take it!" cried Lyndell breathlessly.

"I wish you to. I was glad to find Miss Garcia

had such strict notions of honor, let us say honesty. She declared that she meant to repay you at the earliest possible moment. My dear young friend, there is justice as well as generosity. You will endear yourself more to Miss Garcia by allowing her to cancel this obligation. We have put our relations on a business footing, though I think I shall end by being extravagantly in love with the child. She is so piquante and original. Such gifts ought not to be lost to the world. When she is famous, as I mean her to be, some of the credit will be due you. She has been most enthusiastic about you."

Lyndell colored with pleasure.

"We go abroad in September. I have some engagements to fill. I think you can trust her to me with no misgivings. I could hardly have been her mother, and one of my regrets is that I have had no children. But whatever one could do for a child shall be done for her, and with just as careful supervision. Then it seems we have only to sign our agreement with Miss Garcia. Will you be witnesses?"

Mrs. Stanwood expressed her gratification. She was really charmed with Mme. Barry. She had heard her sing years before, though much of her time recently had been spent abroad.

When this business had been concluded madame took her departure, with the most cordial expressions of pleasure at having met Miss Garcia's friends.

Mrs. Stanwood decided the night train would be much pleasanter for a return. Mrs. Weir and Lyndell had quite renewed old acquaintanceship, and she cordially expressed the gratification she had felt in Dell's preference for her in the matter of Miss Garcia.

"It is rather out of the ordinary course of events, and certainly Mme. Barry has quite fallen in love with your *protégée*. You will feel very proud of your share in the transaction, when she is famous."

It seemed so strange to Dell to have the matter taken entirely out of her hands in this manner.

If she had doubted Anita's regard for her before this, she understood that for some cause the young girl had used a great deal of repression. She need never question again whether her answer to Leonard had been right or not. She knew that if he had earnestly desired to win Anita, he would have gone without consulting anyone.

They could all lay aside any fears for the future. Dell experienced a sense of relief in this. What a curious chain of incidents it had been all the way through!

The parting was tenderer than Lyndell could have imagined. Then the travelers turned their faces toward Sherburne House.

Lyndell experienced a peculiar melancholy. The interest had not gone out of her life, it was true, but it was no longer a thing to call forth active plans. Was there anything left for real activity? Life seemed full of dull shadows with no sunshine behind, no silver lining to the vague clouds.

Aunt Julia watched the grave face as they were driving out to Ardmore.

"Surely, Lyndell," she exclaimed, in a tender tone, "you have nothing to regret? It was one chance out of a thousand for Miss Garcia. No mere money could have done it for her. And it was really too much of a responsibility for a young and inexperienced girl like you."

“Oh, no, Aunt Julia! I give thanks to the uttermost. It seems a special providence.”

“I am glad for Laura’s sake, for all their sakes. One can never be quite sure of a man’s wayward fancy. Leonard, I observe, has come to have a higher-conscientiousness; and he might decide that it would be only honorable to make her an offer of marriage if she remained in this vicinity.”

“She would not accept him.” Dell was glad to say this, though she did not give her authority.

“There can be no question about it now.”

No one spoke of this view to Dell, but she felt the ease of mind it gave. Everbody rejoiced at Miss Garcia’s good fortune. Mme. Barry had too fine a reputation in the musical world for this to be less than the highest compliment.

Millicent was free now to take up the old pursuits and pleasures, and she made an effort to be more than cousinly to Lyndell. The days flew by rapidly. Lady Ashton returned in time for Violet’s wedding, and was to spend some of the intervening weeks in Washington.

It had not quite the delightful aspect of Millicent’s wedding, though there were more guests from a distance. But the group of young cousins that had made the first marriage so enchanting was quite broken. Harry Lepage was in Japan, Ethel was still abroad, and Archie could not get leave just at that juncture. But the old church was beautiful with flowers, and the greetings were cordial and heartfelt. There was a houseful of guests at Beaumanoir, and late in the afternoon the young couple started on their journey to New York to take the steamer abroad.

Three weeks later Sherburne House was all astir. Bevis Osborne had arrived in splendid looks and health, a most enthusiastic lover. Business had gone on smoothly, and the plans now were a certainty. Gifford had been staying at Sherburne House for a fortnight, waiting for some new opening in the autumnal stir of business.

"You had better come out and cast in your lot with us," Mr. Osborne said. "We can surely find something for you to do. There are still opportunities, everything is not so crowded. For a year or so we shall need all the really valuable help we can get. Don't you suppose the colonel will require a private secretary?" to Lady Ashton. "I might like one myself, though perhaps my correspondence will not be quite so onerous."

Alice blushed at the glance directed to her.

"Are you really in earnest?" asked Gifford, his eyes lighting.

"Why, yes, I am in earnest now," returned Osborne, smiling, "though I spoke in the advisory tone elder men are given to using. Why should you not, if you have no especial 'call' here? You will not be giving up any particular home ties. And unless you have thought out your future on some favorite line——"

He paused and glanced at his prospective brother-in-law. Gifford, like Alice, had the divine gift of looking younger than he was. Just now he was thin and pale from his summer's confinement, with only an hour or two leisure in the day.

"I don't know that I have any especial plan or aim," said the young fellow, in a rather disconsolate tone.

"Then take up the great American one of making money. We may laugh about it and scout it, but money does stand for most of the good things of life. Still, I should be very miserable if I thought I had to devote all my days to it. I sometimes look at those keen, grasping old men, and wonder how they will ever be resigned to die and 'leave their riches for others.' No, I want some real comfort and pleasure out of life, therefore I mean to double my joys," laughingly.

Alice looked up with a happy smile. Then she let her eyes stray over to her brother.

"I wish you would, Gif," she said persuasively. "Dell is coming out, and Tessy Murray has half promised."

"She holds out the girls as the great attraction—or is it reward? Well we have no superabundance of girls in our vicinity, it is true," rejoined Osborne.

Gifford kept revolving the idea in his mind. "I have half a mind to try, Dell," he said to her, later on in the evening. "It would seem clean and clear away from all associations. Not that I am too cowardly to stay here and redeem myself, but now and then I have been confronted with an old acquaintance—I wonder why no one is quite willing to let you walk by yourself, in a better way! They all want to pull you back. It is so easy to slip into dangerous paths."

"Oh, Gifford!" Dell caught his arm in half affright.

"I think you need not really fear for me," he replied, with a touch of solemnity in his tone. "I've been through two or three temptations this summer. The worst is the old friends with whom you have

wasted your money. They are jolly and generous; at least, that is the way it appears on the surface. Well, they *are* generous sometimes. But you so soon fall into other hands. I am so ashamed of that old life that I can't bear to see anyone connected with it. Of course the worst was in New York. Len came to me one day with quite a good offer from a New York house. It is queer how things assail you. The son of one of the partners in this house was one of the compeers of that worst part of the worst year. He had plenty of money, and delighted in orgies. You cannot give them any other name. And he was a nice, attractive young fellow, too. Len was a little vexed at first."

"Oh, didn't you tell him?" cried Dell, who did not want Gifford blamed unjustly.

"Yes, I did. He was very good about it. Leonard will make a fine man. Yet his college life wasn't any more promising than that of many others, and he always was spoiled by an adoring family. But I think he never was tempted by drink."

Dell gave a little shudder.

"It *is* a horrible vice. I shall always look back with shame to those two years. And the awful irresponsibility it brings about when one's mind is so debased that it cannot judge between a matter of merriment and a great wrong. But Len thought me rather weak; though he saw going there to New York might lead to inquiries about me which would not be pleasant. I should run against a good many old friends in the city. Dell——"

There was such a long pause that Lyndell looked up inquiringly.

"Dell, there are some things that puzzle me very

much." His voice dropped to a low key, but the others were so far away there was no danger of being overheard. "I've been trying since last winter, when the issues of life and death were set so plainly before me, to cling to the greater strength promised, to be strong in that. And I feel all my wretched, halting weakness. Here is Len, not really trying to live up to any religious standard; a chap who used to get in dreadful tempers and almost sweep everybody off the board; who did pretty much as he liked, whether other people liked it or not; developing into a fine, strong man. Heaven knows he was in enough temptation last winter, but no one ever spoke of his drinking. In fact, he is praised on every hand as one of the rising young men. Where does he get his strength to walk so serenely through dangers? I was in one Sunday, when he was full of a knotty point he was to elucidate the next day, and he told me that he worked until midnight, but he succeeded. He was not troubled about using the Lord's day for his work. What gives him the strength and the certainty promised to—promised elsewhere?

Dell drew a long breath. How many times she had puzzled over this mystery.

"I think Leonard has been very much in earnest at times about the higher living. He was ill so long, you know, and had many serious thoughts. He has not come to the real truth and sincerity at all times—Oh, have any of us?" she cried suddenly.

"But the strength? I want the strength to feel sure. I want a certainty."

"And you remember the warning—'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed'? I suppose there is strength enough given us to stand on the place where

God wants us to do our work. But we must reach out and take hold of it. And sometimes, when we are looking at other people, I wonder if the other warning, or command, will not apply—‘What is that to thee? follow thou me.’”

Gifford caught both her hands. She had grown very dear to him this last year.

“If I had you always.” The pressure was intense, but the meaning was not definite, even to himself. “You have the right strength, I do believe. Or is it partly a Sherburne gift? Sometimes I think there *is* a good deal in heredity. And with poor father—mamma always had her way about everything, and he took the working end, the confinement and anxiety. He always gave in when there was a disputed point. But he had no vices, and I begin to think now very few faults. And Alice is gentle and yielding. Do you know, I am very glad to have my new brother-in-law one of the strong, large-hearted men! And he makes just the same business of love.”

Dell was trying to release her hands.

“I hate to go so far, because I shall not see you. I save up things to talk over with you. When I make any special effort I always think that you will approve, and I do try to keep from things I know you would consider wrong.”

“Oh, Gifford!” she cried eagerly; “there is where you make a mistake. We are not strong enough for each other. Only God is strong enough for that. And since he has promised his grace shall be sufficient, we have no right to fall back upon heredity or anything that keeps us from trusting in him. We do not think as much of the escape as we do of the temptation, I am afraid.”

"You will write to me? Oh, I wonder if I *would* like to be so far away? Even Len has been a great comfort. To miss you out of my life——"

"You must learn to stand alone. But you will have Alice and Lady Ashton; and the colonel is delightful."

"You would be sure to come out sometime?" he said lingeringly.

Alice called to her, and she took Gifford over into the circle. They had been very dear friends, and she felt that he did not realize he was on the verge of something deeper than friendship. He did lack self-reliance, or that peculiar conscientiousness that will not let go of the right through any stress. Would not an entire change be beneficial to him?

"I am so glad you spoke of it," she said to Mr. Osborne. "If you could find some opening for him!"

"I shall be sure to, if you all desire it. It will make Alice happier to have someone of her very own. Though I might be jealous of *you*."

They both laughed gayly.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER THE WEDDING BELLS.

SHERBURNE HOUSE was put in bridal array during the first week of October. The weather was magnificent, and though roses were gone except a few beds of the cultivated kind, there was a profusion of bloom and loveliness. Aunt Aurelia had decided it, and given a great pleasure to Dell. It would be one of the delightful remembrances of the place as the years went on.

The only drawback to unalloyed happiness was Mrs. Lepage. She stipulated at first for a very quiet wedding, with only the immediate relatives.

"There will be no dancing or merry-making, you need not fear," returned Aunt Aurelia, with some of her old sharpness. "But we shall ask in the lifelong friends and neighbors. A daytime wedding is not usually a very gay one."

So she gave her orders, and Aunt Jue carried them out.

The next bone of contention was Gifford.

"I don't know why I should be deprived of all my children because we are poor," Mrs. Lepage flung out angrily.

"But if Gifford can do better there?"

"He can do well enough in Washington. I have made two applications for a government clerkship. His father had a great many friends, and Mr. Long-

worth's influence is worth a good deal to a young man starting in life. Of course his father meant him to have a profession, and Leonard would help there. Gifford ought to pay some regard to his father's wishes. And I need one son to apply to in an emergency. It is very hard."

And though Mrs. Lepage was not much given to sentiment, she shed tears very easily nowadays.

"It is too bad to make Alice so unhappy," Aunt Jue said, half provoked. "If she were not so very much in love it would be most disheartening for her. Mr. Osborne will have a poor opinion of his mother-in-law."

On the whole it rather amused Dell. She had quite outgrown her fear of Aunt Lepage. The inconsequence and unreasonableness seemed childish.

Gifford began to be more and more won by his brother-in-law. And though the past was buried sacredly in a few hearts, he could not feel quite the same. The sin and shame were too near by.

Lady Ashton was very motherly to him, with the sort of appreciation quite lacking in his own mother. The frivolities of the world had not taken possession of her, though she had been among them many years.

Leonard came down; he often did now for a night or a day. And his advice settled it.

"I'd go for a year or two, Gif," he said. "It will be a splendid thing for your health to have some vigorous out-of-door life. And mentally it will give you another start. You are not up to your years. Some fellows don't mature until five-and-twenty or so. You will stand a better chance if you want to come back East and embark in some business."

They had not been quite sure of Ethel, but the vessel came in on time, and she and Mr. Longworth would be down to spend the night.

Other friends and relatives arrived, and Sherburne House seemed overflowing with cordiality.

The morning was all one could desire. Milly came over and took possession of the bride-elect in such a quiet, decisive fashion that even Ethel could not presume. She was quite full of her own glories and plans for the winter.

"You certainly have been a very foolish girl," commented Ethel. "But it is too late now to repent. Mr. Osborne is a gentleman—we must say that for him—and well connected. If he should succeed in his business ventures, it may not be so bad. But you really have grown better looking, absolutely pretty. I had an idea you would fade early. Some very fair women do. But oh, what you will miss this winter! I've made some splendid new friends. Mamma is dreadfully disappointed that you did not keep to your engagement."

Alice colored, but she would not descend to explanations. Ethel colored, too, under all her high-bred composure. During her few days in London she had heard of a rather wild escapade Mr. Phillips had been through with a young and pretty actress, and had begun to lose faith in him.

Alice came down in her soft white silk wedding gown and veil. Florence was her maid of honor. Fanny, Dell, and Millicent, Gifford, Leonard, and Bertram Carew made a half circle, and the other relatives stood around. The servants clustered on the porch and in the hall, delighted to have so important an event occur at Sherburne House.

"An' next it will be Miss Dell's turn; don't be fergittin' that," said old Dinah.

Lizzy Jackson was up to the "big house." Indeed, everybody was glad to come to do ever so little, just for a look at the bride.

"Oh, missy! I hope you'll be just as happy when your time comes. We're all wishin' you the best of good luck in our hearts, and a splendid, handsome husband. And no going away from Sherburne House."

Her significant glance fell on Leonard, and Dell blushed scarlet. Was the old plan to follow her always?

Mr. Beaumanoir gave his niece away in a tender, reverent fashion, and her new husband held her to his heart a moment before he kissed her. And then came the congratulations, sweet, heartfelt, joyous; and some with the old-fashioned quaintness they had used with the bride at Sherburne House twenty-five and thirty years ago.

"It was so beautiful!" said Dell, with a tremble in her voice. "I shall always like to remember it, Alice. You seem to have hallowed the place."

"And that *you* made it possible. Oh, Dell! you will always be like a dear sister to me."

The great dining room was in grand array, with its polished silver that had served brides a century or two before. Alice cut the cake, her husband responded to the toasts for her, there was much good-fellowship and neighborly heartiness. Then the bride slipped away with Dell and Milly and donned her pretty soft gray dress and hat, and a procession of carriages escorted them to the station; their send-off the exuberant joy of the negroes who lined the avenue, wild with delight.

A number of the guests were going to Washington with the bridal party, Dr. Carew among them. He came over to say good-by to Lyndell.

"Tessy Murray should have been here," he said. "How was it? Didn't you ask her?"

"Yes. It was Alice's only disappointment."

"I thought she would surely come. Have you heard Con is in India, and is going to Japan? He has been doing some very good newspaper work, I believe. I have wondered what Con would make of himself. He took some terms at chemistry in Germany. Why, I saw Tessy—not a fortnight ago."

He glanced at Dell in an unconscious fashion, as if he was puzzling over something.

Tessy's defection was a mystery to Lyndell. At almost the last moment a beautiful gift had come for Alice and a letter of regrets, not clearly stating the reason, but holding out the hope that before many months she would see Alice in her new home. Everybody was disappointed, even Aunt Aurelia.

"Milly has taken you into her confidence, I heard," and Bertram smiled with a fine ingenuousness, colored a little, too, with a kind of pride.

"Oh!" Dell exclaimed. "It is so wonderful, so delightful. I can hardly make it seem true. And the poems were so touching, so beautiful. I am all eagerness to see the story."

Her face was alight with intensity. He studied it with an expression that startled her and made her turn away.

"I am so glad," he added, after a momentary embarrassment. "You two are so dear to each other. You will be more so now that the others are gone."

Leonard came around and joined in the farewells.

Then he took Dell's arm, as if to guide her. There was a curiously satisfied look in his face. It was the last glimpse Bertram had of her.

"It was a really beautiful wedding. It made Sherburne House seem quite like old times. Not that I remember weddings, exactly," and Leonard laughed gayly. "Though Aunt Julia was married in my time, and a cousin who used to visit a good deal here, and who now lives in Baltimore. But there used to be other merry-makings——"

He handed her into the carriage. Milly was going back with them, Mrs. Lepage and Ethel to Beaumanoir. There were guests still at Sherburne House, and the air of festivity lingered. The colored contingent were eagerly disporting themselves in gala costume, making merry at the different cabins over wedding cake and various luxuries from the great house.

They missed Alice very much, and Lady Ashton, who had become almost a member of the family. She sent a note from Washington just as they were starting for their journey across the continent; and from various stations as they passed through. Alice's first letter came from her new home. It was so much more beautiful than she had expected that she seemed wildly enthusiastic. The colonel was delighted to get his wife back, and gave the bride the warmest of welcomes. "I foresee," wrote Alice, "that I shall be completely spoiled. This will finish what Sherburne House began. More than ever I appreciate all your love and goodness to Gifford and myself, and dear papa."

It had all been worth doing. Was it not the real work of life; the thing God had set before her?

And now Dell had time to look the future in the face. Why should it have such a dreary aspect? The long winter—had winters or summers ever been long before? There would be letters and letters. There might even be some pleasures. Ethel had been extremely cordial.

“Now that the others are out of the way, you must come up and have your turn,” she had said in her most gracious manner. The heiress of Sherburne House was not to be despised. Fanny Beaumanoir had another year in school, and it would be a long while before beautiful Florence could be introduced. Dell was certainly fine-looking.

“And I do suppose,” she said to her mother, “that the little tiff between her and Leonard has about blown over. I noticed that he was very devoted, and paid her a certain respect that is very flattering to a girl. Leonard’s wife can take a fine position in society. And with a few judicious touches here and there, Dell can be made an attractive woman. If she only had a little more suavity!”

“Of course her fortune will always count. It does seem as if grandfather might have divided it a little more evenly.”

“It is partly the turn of events,” and Ethel’s air was one of superior wisdom. “No one supposed that old waste land would be worth so much. The development of Southern industries has made a market for both coal and iron, and the new railroad adds to its value. I wouldn’t mind if Dell had grown sentimental over Gifford.”

“I never thought of that!” said the mother, full of regret over wasted opportunities. “And I am sure Leonard could make his fortune and standing without

all that aid. But money often goes to those who do not need it."

If Dell had known that she was being grandly avenged! But she had outgrown her old childish desires in her real pity for the misfortunes of the Lepage family. That Alice was happy gave her an intense satisfaction. That Gifford would be under excellent influences for the next few years, lifted a great burden from her heart. Surely Ethel had what she most desired.

She was fain to be so busy that she could not really think of the future, except to consider what she would do when she was truly mistress here. She was beginning to understand what she would like to do. Something large and gracious. She would like to live in a wider sphere; to gather people about her who were even now stirring the great world of thought. If she had nothing to give them, they would have much to give her. She could listen and be interested; she might learn by degrees; she might even take up some work, if it was not writing books.

Why, even Tessy Murray had this wider outlook! Dr. Carew had brought it into her life. Strange, now that she thought of it, the experiences had not roused Tessy to any unrest. She could see her as she had sat beside Aunt Aurelia making lace, her soft eyes alight with interest, as if lace-making were the great thing in the world. Lyndell felt impatient.

Con would be coming home by and by, full of knowledges, taking a part in the world's work. Mr. Murray was proud of him; he had a right to be. And James had gained a prize for some beautiful architectural drawings. Murray & Cranston's houses were spoken of as quite superior, and people came to

consult with them; to engage them, if it was possible. There was a stir and activity that set all the pulses athrill.

But at Sherburne House the lines were fixed. She had outgrown them, and yet she must try to go on living in the narrow paths some other hands had laid. Her strong nature rebelled.

Sometime Millicent would go away again; out in that wide, lovely experience that touched other lives, roused them, made them glad with great, uplifting joy. She could speak to them with tongue and pen, Dr. Carew could raise and save wearied bodies and despairing souls. For with all his knowledge he had not cast aside the simple faith of his father; he still believed it was God's world, and that he was put in it to do the work God had appointed. To live in nearness to such a grand, tender soul, to help build up the pure and true by wise counsel and unwearied exertion, would be an intense satisfaction because the inmost desire went gladly to the fulfillment of every purpose.

"I am meanly, selfishly jealous that this lovely work and reward should come to her," Lyndell Sherburne said to herself. "And she was the first one at Sherburne House who held out a kindly hand to me. I am base beyond comparison."

Only yesterday Millicent had been over and begged her to drive with her in the delicious autumn sunshine. Dell had made letters an excuse; had she not been a little curt as well?

She rose suddenly and changed her gown, put on her hat, and went downstairs. Aunt Julia was lying on the sofa, and there was a smell of aromatic vinegar.

"Oh, Aunt Jue! what is the matter."

Mrs. Stanwood raised herself and gave a tremulous half laugh.

"A dreadful headache, for one thing. I haven't felt really well for several days, a little feverish and upset. I have been thinking the doctor would come in, and now have sent Julius for him. Don't stay in, my dear, for I am going up to bed."

"But I might do something——"

"There is nothing to do, and quiet will be best. If you liked to get the boys and take them a little drive! I have been promising to. And you might stop at Beaumanoir."

"I was going over to see Milly."

"Well, do not alarm them. I shall be about again in a day or two."

Dell stooped and kissed her. Then she wet the bit of linen again and laid it back on the fevered brow. Aunt Julia was so seldom ill.

The sunshine and the rich, drowsy air were full of fragrances. Vines were throwing out long crimson arms, as if clinging to the trees in a fervent embrace. The tawny husks of the bitter-sweet were showing shining scarlet seeds, and the great field of sumac was a reddish brown with flaming crimson leaves. The beauty moved her.

Millicent sat out under a great maple with some sewing in her hand. Nora was playing and laughing at the antics of a little black handmaiden. Dell looked over. The mother was embroidering a soft red dress for the little one. She glanced up and smiled.

"I have come to return your invitation!" exclaimed Dell. "Will you accept and take Nora? I am to gather up Win and Floyd, and we will have a driving party."

"With pleasure," returned Millicent. "I am so glad to see you. Papa was going over. Have you had letters?"

"Julius seldom goes until the late mail."

"Papa brought in ours half an hour ago. Poor Cousin Carrick is dead. She has been poorly some weeks, and there was no hope of her recovery. How dreadful it will be for poor Miss Eliza! They were so disappointed about not coming to the weddings."

Dell was a little awe-stricken. To go out of life in this glowing, inspiriting weather!

Millicent was ready in a few moments, and Nora began to chatter gayly with Dell, who always found the way to children's hearts.

"I wonder if Aunt Jue will go? It wouldn't be wise for Aunt Aurelia to take the journey. She has hardly recovered from the other excitements."

"Aunt Julia is not at all well. And she may be quite ill before it is over. Julius went for Dr. Carew."

"I thought she looked poorly yesterday, but she would not admit it."

Dell had not noted. She had been so occupied with her own thoughts. And now, like a moment's flash, a fear came to her. Aunt Julia had been so much to them all! Had she not given up a good deal to keep the wheels of Sherburne House running smoothly? Was it not someone's place to consider her?

And she had said there was so little for her at Sherburne House. She wanted to get away and be doing some of the great things of the world.

The children had started homeward, dismissed earlier than usual for some cause. They picked

them up, and for the next hour there was enough to do answering questions.

She drove Milly home with her. Dr. Carew was just going away.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Dell, stretching out her hand.

"Nothing to be alarmed about. A little cold and a bit of fever. She must stay in bed two or three days. So poor Miss Carrick has gone; I didn't think she would live through the autumn. And what the lonely one will do!"

Mr. Beaumanoir came and lifted the children out.

Little Nora clasped her arm about his neck and laughed gleefully.

"We have been talking about a little journey. Aunt Aurelia thinks we ought to go in as strong a force as possible, and I proposed to take you and Dell. I should feel safer about Julia if your mother were within call. But Miss Neale would come up any time."

They had entered the old sitting room. Aunt Aurelia glanced up thoughtfully.

"You will have to go early to-morrow morning," she said. "Lyndell, you must be our representative. I am very sorry about Julia. But there really is no need of Laura staying. They are out of the range of most of the relatives, and there have been but two of them for so long. Poor Eliza!"

Miss Aurelia gave a little sigh, and thanks for her own surroundings.

"It will be a great comfort to see you," she added, a moment later.

Dell had felt quite disinclined for the melancholy errand. But the words "a great comfort" struck

home to her heart; and Aunt Aurelia thought of comforting others. It had not always been so. A perception of possible duties mingled with latent good, with kindness, in the out-of-the-way corners, touched with a generous sense of higher love and accomplishment, swept over her. If she wanted to go out to any great work that was far off, almost impossible, could she not begin with the nearby things, homely little details of everyday life?

"Yes," said Millicent. "We will plan everything to-night. Perhaps Dell had better come home with us."

"No," returned Dell. "I shall be anxious about Aunt Julia." She kissed Millicent and little Nora, and Aunt Aurelia said she would be sent over in the morning.

But Miss Sherburne walked out with Mr. Beaumanoir, and added softly, standing on the porch:

"You will see that all is right with them. They have been straitened a good deal, I know."

Aunt Julia's paroxysm of headache was over, but she had quite a rise of fever.

"Still, I have a feeling that it will not be much. I am so rarely ill or even tired out. There has been a good deal to do, and the fall cleaning, to say nothing of the changes in clothing, the putting away and getting out, and the sewing."

Lyndell had been occupied with herself and her own thoughts since the marriage of Alice Lepage—what her life might be under favoring circumstances; what it was not, in bitter retrospection. She might have helped with this other burden.

But if she had not the interest in this common little round? Would it not be in a certain sense hypocriti-

cal to assume it? Above all things she wanted to be true, sincere.

"Aunt Julia," she began, "we have just had news of Miss Maria Carrick's death. At least—our letters have not come yet, but Uncle Beaumanoir had his. I wonder if I *ought* to go with them? I'd rather stay and help nurse you."

"You must go in my place, dear; and I really shall not need nursing. Cassy will look after me, and see to the children. Poor Maria! They did not think she would live through last winter, but she improved so much in the spring. And they were able to make that nice visit. What does Aunt Aurelia say?"

"She wishes me to go."

"Yes, I thought she would. The young people grow up to take our places," and Aunt Julia gave a faint little smile. "Go down to Aunt Aurelia, dear. The doctor insists that I shall keep in bed a few days."

It seemed strange indeed, and but for the children would have been a rather solitary supper. It was set on the small round table, and suggested breakfasts and teas on her first coming to Sherburne House. She looked over the boys' lessons afterward, and explained some of the hard points; then cuddled them a little after they were in bed.

Aunt Aurelia often went to her room early. Dell passed through it to say good-night.

"Lyndell," she said, with a gentleness in her voice that had come partly from failing strength, and God only knew how much of it from earnest endeavor—"I have been thinking—there won't be much time in the morning, so I had better say it now. I want you to persuade Cousin Eliza to come home with you. I've been writing a note, but perhaps you can put it

in better shape; words seem more earnest and full of meaning when they are spoken. And you have a way—it will be too lonely for her there, and she's not as young as forty years ago. Try!"

Could she have dreamed a few years ago of Aunt Aurelia asking a favor, giving her a charge?

She went to her own room, that she had made beautiful with the desires and needs of womanhood. There lay her book with the marker in it. She was reading here yesterday when Millicent came, and had somehow lost the thread of the abstruse theories. It was one of the books young Dr. Carew admired. Did it matter so much, after all, to one's daily life what had gone on ages ago? The question at last would be one's share in it, the deeds of the sixty or seventy years—whether one had added any beauty and truth and ease for their fellow-creatures of to-day? Something swept imperiously across her mind: "The night cometh in which no man can work." And was not work everything? not merely one grand, high thing?

She took some other reading to-night, and after all, went to bed early.

The journey was of considerable length by train. The rough, neglected country recalled to Dell the first part of the long-ago journey, when she had tried to escape from Sherburne House. They went through long stretches of woods, and, emerging, saw the mountain ranges in the distance. Then a few houses that had been centers of lovely living, no doubt, now neglected, deserted, or left to dilapidation, negroes, and poor whites. Several times they had planned to go to the cousins, but something had interfered. Milly had made one visit since her widowhood. Dell felt a little conscience-smitten. How full and rich her life had

been! Was she to put the treasures in a large drawing room and open it only on grand occasions to the select few who could understand the mysteries? Was not that what she was longing to do?

Mr. and Mrs. Beaumanoir talked of the old days when Cousin Maria had been quite a beauty and a belle; the marriage of their brother, that had been their pride and disappointment as well. His wife was dead, he was some sort of under-secretary in a consulship abroad, and his daughter had a studio, and was a rather advanced woman, past her youth. Twice a year they had a brief note from him.

"I do not see how brothers and sisters can forget each other so," said Millicent, with a kind of indignant surprise.

"*They* did not forget. I suppose the early life has so faded from his memory that it is like a vague dream. He would feel wonderfully strange in it."

"But to think of Leonard or Ned caring so little whether one was dead or alive!"

Millicent's face flushed at the thought of alienation.

"We have lived closer together," and her father smiled. "Their sister-in-law was fascinated with the air of courts, and became most un-American. A man's wife often does a good deal toward shaping his character. There are more of you, and I hope family ties will count for something nearer and dearer."

From the train they changed to the stage. Their hour's ride was well-nigh martyrdom, through the rough country. At the "Corners," there was a shabby sort of old-time tavern, with a few men sitting out on a sunny bench, playing cards, a broken horse trough, and general dilapidation. A rickety coach stood there, and the old driver dismounted, respect-

fully touched his high hat—of twenty years' ago fashion—with a broad black band. The crown-edge was worn gray with frequent brushings.

He presented "Mis' Liza's" compliments in a solemn manner, and they lost nothing by the elaboration. Then they were obsequiously assisted into the faded, moth-eaten equipage.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE SHADE.

“OH, dear! another drive!” cried Dell, aghast. “One wouldn’t desire to make such journeys very often.”

Mrs. Beaumanoir looked quite weary. Millicent was pale, and gave a soft sigh.

“I think it is about a mile.”

“Yes, sah! a mile further. But we’s got a bettah road. An’ I’ll drive up.”

He chirruped to the horses and snapped the lash beside them with a great flourish. They were old, but looked well fed.

The road was better and more picturesque. It crossed a small stream, but the planks rattled dangerously. Past a bit of pine wood they came in sight of the house, with its untidy negro cabins scattered about, and a few fields of stacked corn, to which the chickens were helping themselves freely. Miss Eliza had always boasted that the old house would last their time out, but one end had fallen down, the ruin partly covered by some close-branching hemlocks.

The “new part” was barely habitable. The fluted porch columns, almost black with weather stains, were patched with pieces of tin, and propped up around the bottom. It was a mystery how the old house held together.

Miss Eliza received them in the hall, large and

bare, with a great fireplace at one side. But the sitting room had a habitable look, although Miss Eliza had reverently removed the purely ornamental articles, and covered the big looking-glass with a square of linen.

"We sent word to all the relatives, but it is so far for most of them to come!" and Miss Eliza sighed. "It was very good of you. We felt we might reasonably expect someone from Sherburne. The services are to be to-morrow morning. Poor Maria has been a great sufferer for the last three winters. She quite recovered in the summer, and the doctor thought last summer's jaunt might add years to her life. But in the heavy storm of two weeks ago the roof in our room gave out, and the exposure was too much, in the middle of the night. I tried to save her all I could, and made a fire down here. We took it for a sick room then, but she didn't need it long, poor dear! And now you must have some dinner."

Adjoining was a dining room. Years ago a partition had been run across it when the old kitchen gave out. During the war it had been hard times with them. Then and since they had disposed of family silver and furniture for their pressing needs, and made no special moan. There was no one to care for relics. They had been brave and kept to the old traditions of gentility. Some of the negroes had remained and worked the place in their thriftless fashion, eking out a living for themselves and their inexpensive mistresses.

Mr. Beaumanoir and the girls took a walk about the estate afterward.

"Aunt Aurelia wouldn't have let things go in this manner," declared Dell. "Yet you can't imagine

their being so *very* poor." The young girl looked puzzled.

"There was no real lack of money at Sherburne House. Your own grandfather had a very good income, which was divided among his living children at his death. But Aunt Aurelia has been an excellent manager. Still, she could hardly make bricks without straw. We modern people have changed the old adage," and he smiled a little. "But these cousins had no clay, even."

Dell gave a deep thanksgiving in her heart. She was very glad to be Miss Sherburne's messenger. How had these two women kept serene and uncomplaining, satisfied with the old things?

"I don't see how anyone could live in this manner." Dell spoke protestingly. She glanced up at Millicent. "Can you see what the life is really worth? I don't mean that one should end it." She shuddered a little at her thought—which was not a real thought, after all. "What useful purpose does it subserve? It seems such a waste——"

She uttered this in the unreasoning impatience of youth, when only great things seem worth the doing.

"I do not believe God ever allows any rightful purpose to go to waste. There was nothing these two women could do but keep straight on. Their lives had all the flavor of the past, all the distillation of youth and hope that had made them fragrant. And the homely duties were as much to them as the greater things to us. It is a part of the old world, before the new restlessness came into it. Whether we can better it with our wider ideas——"

"But *you* wouldn't like to live it, Milly?"

"Yet if it had been my lot? I told you once I

gave thanks, when baby was born, that she was a girl. But if my son had been sent to be the heir of Luckenwalde, and after all it is a fine patrimony, I must have made myself content with many of the trivial things of life. I should have known that it was for discipline or happiness. And in that case I should have prayed for grace to make the best of the limitation. I did pray, but there were times when I rebelled."

"You, Milly!" Dell glanced at her in amaze.

"Oh, do you suppose I can see no failures or mistakes? Dell, there were times when I thought it a sin to have Emil's long life wasted. He was broader and touched more with the spirit of progress than Waldemar, who kept simply within the old rims; nor was he superficial and light, like Franz. We are so different over here. I used to think great thoughts for him. I had ambitions, and I did try to rouse him to my ideas. I do not know just what he would have done in the world, but I was resolved to make life quite worth the living. And looking back at it now I can see how it was filled with unnoticed things that God took care of. He made everyone happy. He spent hours with Waldemar, being bright and entertaining and never impatient. His mother missed him very much, she admitted at the last. He did the work that was given him to do with a kind of gladness that was like sunshine. I might have improved on the life, I might have marred and spoiled it, and God took it out of my hands altogether. I can't tell why. I have ceased to ask. And whatever he truly puts in its place I shall accept."

"But if one could tell what was really put in, the striving would cease," the young girl said; yet her tone was irresolute.

"Our striving must never cease—for ourselves or others. I think we come to know, after a little, when any desire is clearly out of our power. The next best may be what we think we do not want, but if it is God's idea for us, we shall see it in the working out."

She smiled a little. She was so secure and happy. The best of all was coming to her. Yes, the very best that Dell could imagine.

"There might have been something better in these lives. Perhaps God allowed them to be barren that someone might grow richer doing them a service. We miss a good many opportunities. There, dear, it is chilly, and we must go in."

She put her arm around Lyndell's shoulder, and they walked on together.

Aunt Aurelia certainly had not missed her opportunity for another. She, Lyndell, had not thought much of that hitherto, she had been so engrossed with the aspirations for herself—the things for her advancement directly, then the giving to others out of the abundance.

She could not make an opportunity to deliver her note quite as she wished until evening. Miss Carrick had gone to her room for a few moments. Dell tapped at the door.

"Aunt Aurelia sent you this," she said, handing her the note, "and I was to supplement it by my strongest powers of persuasion," smiling in a kind of sympathetic certainty.

Miss Carrick read it over twice. It was not lengthy. It did not offer her a home, as if in benevolent friendliness. It asked her to come and spend some months, so that she, Miss Sherburne, could the more easily persuade Mrs. Stanwood to take a good

long outing this winter with her husband. She had been confined too closely, and she wanted some other companionship in the house, so that Lyndell might feel more free to go and come.

Miss Carrick's faded eyes filled with tears.

"I don't think you will have to try your powers of persuasion twice," she said awkwardly. "My dear, I was thinking how I could stand the winter here alone. To be sure, I could have gone visiting; but to be of real service to someone—— You see, I have had Maria so long to wait on and nurse. I should feel better doing something, or making believe. But for you to be beset by two queer old women! You'll want the patience of a saint!"

Dell smiled again, and wished Aunt Aurelia could see the gratification in the old eyes.

"And so your own aunt is quite poorly; I suppose it is hard being away from her husband so much. My dear, I shall be glad to come when I get straightened out a little. It was so kind in her to think of it. We have always so enjoyed our visits at Sherburne House."

Then Miss Carrick kissed the blooming cheek, and busied herself with her dressing table, so that the young girl might not see her tears.

Dell thought about Aunt Julia afterward. It had hardly entered her mind that staying at Sherburne House entailed any sacrifice. The children were here and going to school, and there were so many friends of her youth around. But she had come when Aunt Aurelia first met with her accident, and there had been the months of Mr. Lepage's illness, the summer of visitors, the weddings.

"I suppose I ought to take more responsibility," she thought. "At least I must not let another life be

sacrificed altogether. Sherburne House came to me whether I would or not, and there is no question about the duties."

Mr. Beaumanoir had a long talk with Miss Carrick after her sister had been laid to rest in the old churchyard where the Carricks had slept for generations. He had taken a thorough survey of the old house, and felt that attempting to repair it would be money thrown away. There was no other member of the family who would undertake such a thing. There was absolutely no sale for property in this section of the country. The ground might be hired out, but even that would amount to little. He proposed her return with them.

"Cousin Sherburne has kindly asked me to come and spend the winter. I can pack the best things over in the south room, and Cephas and Polly will come and stay. Then in the spring I will consider. I'd always counted on ending my days here, but it is hard to be alone, so far away from any of your own kin. You are all very good to me."

Her voice trembled with emotion.

"But you must not be left here at all," said Mrs. Beaumanoir. "And every day will make the journey more difficult. It will be so much better to go back with us."

"It is so sudden. And there are so many things to see to. I hadn't thought of such a thing, you know."

"We must insist upon taking her home," Mr. Beaumanoir had said to his wife. "She has scraped up every penny to pay Maria's funeral expenses and doctor's bills. There will be nothing for her to live on, and she is too proud to accept assistance. Once at Sherburne House, she will get over her loss easier."

It was very kind of Aunt Aurelia, but I should have proffered a home myself."

There was not much to move to the "best room," which at present was secure from leakage. Miss Carrick packed a trunk of her choicest belongings and some trinkets, articles long ago laid aside by the demands of age and changing fashions. Everything wearable had been altered and put to the best use. Yet Miss Carrick looked quite the lady in her black bombazine, that had been redyed, and her mourning veil, that had always been folded and put away carefully. Here was poverty at its best estate, Lyndell felt, too proud even to admit the mortification. For their journey in the summer had broken into their little hoard of savings. There was enough, however, for present emergencies, and she would begin to save up again from the pittances for the land.

Cephas, old and grizzled, was trustworthy, and had served the family faithfully. Polly was his second wife, quite a shrewd manager, and she declared:

"Missus needn't give herself a speck of trouble. She'd find everyting jes de same when she done come back in de spring."

So they took the poor sorrowing soul back with them. The death had been rather sudden, it was true, but many a night last winter she had expected it to happen before dawn, the cough had been so distressing.

And as she looked into the old room with the great patch off the ceiling, she sighed, yet she could hardly wish her sister back.

"If I stayed I should keep living it over again and listening for the cough, imagining that I heard it. And the nights of fever were so distressing! Poor

dear Maria! In the spring I shall feel as if I was coming back to you."

That was the moan she made to herself. She tried to be outwardly cheerful in return for the kindly attentions. Millicent was so lovely, and she had known loss and sorrow.

The first glimpse Dell caught of anyone as she reached Sherburne House was Aunt Julia, rather paler than usual, and with a tired look about the eyes, as if her few days in bed had not quite rested her.

"Dear Aunt Jue," she cried, with her arms about the elder's neck, "I am so glad you are improved! And now I am going to set myself to work to see that you have a little rest and pleasure. I think I have been very selfish, taking things so much for granted, and quite as if I had no duties at all."

She uttered all in a rapid breath, before Aunt Aurelia could come to greet her.

"Where is Cousin Carrick?"

"Uncle Beaumanoir would keep her until she was rested up a bit and Aunt Julia was quite well. Oh, Aunt Aurelia, your little letter was enough without any word of mine. I think she was really glad, though there were so many memories to leave behind. But oh, the poor old house; it is a perfect ruin!"

"I suspected that it might be. They have been faithful to it and to each other. The old people are dropping out," and she gave a soft sigh.

Sherburne House presented such a delightful aspect in its substantial good order that Dell felt she wanted to greet every room afresh. She did owe a great deal of it to Aunt Aurelia. And she knew that in a hundred little ways Miss Sherburne had tried to

make amends for the old unfortunate time when they had been foes instead of friends.

Perhaps her week had exercised a new influence upon her thoughts. She was not to give up to Millicent the thing she coveted; it had been hers from the beginning. She had a glimpse of a grand and satisfying future, a world in which she could live up to the fullest desires within her. Perhaps they would not be the noblest. She had thought of self and the center from which she could radiate telling influences. She had desired too much. This was not for her. No inspiring voice had said to her, "Come up higher." She had been grasping at shadows to draw herself up. She had made a sad, mortifying mistake when she thought this portion was for her satisfaction and refreshment. She had taken hope when Alice's half desire, half dream had come so unexpectedly to her, that this delicious unfolding was on its way to herself.

Perhaps she was not worthy. She had not the requisite gifts. Let her remember this in all humility. Her place was here at Sherburne House.

To give up all the splendid dreams that stirred her young womanhood—ah, could she! And then she remembered those to whom God had given their desires and "sent leanness withal into their souls." In the midst of sorrow and retirement, but always accepting what came to hand, and doing her duty, Millicent's soul had unfolded and borne its blossom of golden fruition.

Not that she could be a genius of any kind! She could only stand near and be lighted by the blessed reflection. And she must allow herself to stand near and be thus lighted. She could not go off and put it out of her life, as one often desires when a thing is

hard to bear. She was very much interested in Millicent's new development. And they were here together, would be for several years to come. She found that Milly had no plans for any immediate change in her life.

She must make herself content at Sherburne House with occasional little journeys here and there. The happenings were of such an ordinary kind. The social life had nothing stirring, inspiriting in it. Neighborhood calls and interests, and somehow most of the young girls were marrying and going away. True, there could be the splendid journey to California. She had promised Lady Ashton as well as Alice. Why not have that for the next thing, and bridge this getting settled to a new atmosphere of resolve?

Aunt Julia, she found, was rather languid. She took her to drive and cared for the children, so that they should not be such a tax on her.

"She wants a change to hearten her up," Dr. Carew said one day, when Dell had stopped to talk over plans of benevolence with Miss Neale. "You see it is getting to be only a half life now. It was her duty when she came; there seemed no one else as much at liberty, and no one so well equipped. Now if Mrs. Lepage could take her place—but that is not to be thought of. Go away she must. She wants the major's tenderness and vital interest for a while, and she ought to have it."

"Aunt Lepage seems to stir up the whole house," Dell said slowly. "I don't see how she *can* be so different."

"Well, when one's aims and plans and pleasures are altogether with society, with the mere excitement

and froth, it is just like any other dissipation—dram-drinking is about the same for some people.”

“If she was”—Dell smiled, with a vague sense of the comparison—“if she was one of the advanced women, always going to conventions and clubs, and full of theories, we should say it was the natural outcome of abnormal ideas. We should have something we could use for a scapegoat. But she despises the modern enlightenment.”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, and from the queer little motion of his mustache you could see the curl of his lip.

“I suppose this is the womanly side,” exclaimed Dell, with laughing sarcasm.

“No, it isn’t the womanly side,” he interrupted impatiently.

“Aunt Lepage is horrified with some of the new ideas, and Ethel denounces them as heartily as you could wish,” Dell said mischievously.

“As if it could make much difference *what* it was, while it interfered with and spoiled lives and homes! Anything that impairs the home center, sets it in the second or third or tenth place, or gives it no place at all—anything that makes a cruel discordance, whether it is society or ambition, or indifference to those around us, is reprehensible. I am glad Alice is not starting out in that way. Yes, it ought to be so that Mrs. Lepage could come here and minister heartily, pleasantly, and ripen her life for her own old age. But it isn’t, and she does Aunt Aurelia more harm than good. My dear, take such care in the shaping of your life that this may not be laid at your door. I want the world advanced, but it is not going to be advanced by harm, even if the all-wise Ruler does

permit it a while. He can make the wrath of man praise him; we have not gone up so far on the side of power."

It was all true. Was not a life turned awry that was incapable of doing good in its proper sphere?

"I hope—Miss Carrick won't wear upon Aunt Aurelia," Dell said, in a slow, rather jerky fashion.

"They are the last of their families in two different lines, and have many memories in common. They might be great friends"—the doctor moved his head so vaguely that it was hardly a shake. "But, Dell, have you not noted that Aunt Aurelia is getting to be one of the new women, and it was an old, old promise—a new being in Christ Jesus. You see the watchword of progress was uttered ages ago. If Miss Carrick hasn't gone on that far, there will need to be some sort of fusion. I wonder if Mrs. Stanwood has taken it all—this lovely, this divine power of harmonizing?"

The doctor drew on his old driving gloves. There was a long journey before him. If it had been shorter and pleasanter, he would have liked to pick up this tall girl, just as he had in her childhood, and take her along. Some time there would be a great question to settle: What her life was to be? and now a mistake would be fatal.

"Look well to Aunt Julia," he said.

She did not stop at Beaumanoir, though Bertram had sent down a new scientific book and a volume of poems, sweet, dainty conceits of a young writer, whose life, full of work and privations, held a great interest for Millicent. She had meant to stay to supper, and have a young girl's good time.

Was she always thinking of her own good times?

Were most things measured by the degree of pleasure they afforded her? She had been trying to make people happy around her; her generous nature expanded in the plan of such work. But had there been much of self-sacrifice in it? Not that purposeless sacrifice amounted to anything; she had the wisdom to see that. And what if she put away a delight of her own, to resume next year—some other time—and took up a work not as entertaining?

Aunt Julia was lying on the sofa in the sitting room. She looked a little pale and weary, not from physical exertion altogether.

Dell dropped down in the little hollow beside her and took the limp hands in hers.

"I thought you were going to Beaumanoir!" said Aunt Julia.

"Well, I did not." Dell gave a soft little laugh. "I was thinking about some things and came home—to talk to you."

"Very weighty things, since you look so grave about them?"

"Do I look grave? I want to look fascinating, persuasive, convincing."

"What new conspiracy are you and Milly hatching?"

Aunt Julia smiled up into the beautiful brown eyes.

"The doctor thinks you ought to go away."

"Oh, it is the doctor, instead of Milly! When a doctor is at his wits' end he prescribes a journey. Am I in such a serious case for a trifling attack? I feel as well as ever, only a little lazy; and we are so quiet there is plenty of time for rest."

"You want a change. This is the doctor's wisdom. I have been too selfish to think of it. But, Aunt

Jue, why can't you go off somewhere with Uncle Dick, or to him, and have a little—well, a little honeymoon? You're not too old for that. I should like to think that honeymoons came at intervals through one's life."

"They do, my dear," with an expression of rare satisfaction.

"Then go off and have one."

Aunt Julia considered. "A month or so would not interfere with anything special, just now. But the children—and Cousin Eliza——"

"Aunt Jue, I think I ought to return some of your kindnesses to me. Mere money can't buy *you* anything, so suppose I give myself a little while? I can't oversee, perhaps, and keep all the servants up straight, but Cassy can. I might try to do some of the other things, looking after Aunt Aurelia's comfort, and being the oil if there should be any friction; entertaining Miss Carrick when she bored Aunt Aurelia, if such a thing should happen. And I *could* care for the children. I ought to begin——"

"My dear!" There were tears in Aunt Julia's eyes.

"You were so good to me," and the brown eyes were lustrous with emotion. "I owe you a good deal. I ought to make some return. And I ought to adapt myself to the needs and demands of Sherburne House. I don't seem to belong to it only in name; and next April I shall be set free from guardians and minority and girlhood, and be a woman in deed and in truth. Oughtn't I look at it seriously?"

Aunt Julia studied her with a half apprehension.

"Not that I want to be mistress in any arbitrary sense at all. I like the freedom to go and come, but

I am afraid so much going does not conduce to stability. I don't want to make pleasure and self the great things of life. And when I think how much of the sweetness of your daily living you have given up——”

Her voice had lowered to a loving appreciation and a half regret that it should be so. There was a soft flush of crimson in her cheek, and her eyes shone with a tender gleam.

“My child, if I gave up some things I had others. Of course we couldn't have Aunt Aurelia left solely to nurses in that trying time. I could not have been traveling around with Uncle Dick just then, and there were two little children to care for, who needed something more domestic than a hotel—a home. Aunt Aurelia had been the dearest of mothers to me. So you see I owed her something. And you need not feel worried; I was very happy the year you were all away. I am not sure but it was a rest and a refreshing to the soul. Before that I had been about a good deal. So you must never think of that as a time of trial.”

Dell kissed the smooth forehead. How many lines had come in that of Aunt Lepage! More than the few years of seniority warranted.

“Lyndell, dear,” the voice had a tender entreaty in it; “if you think you owe me anything ‘but to love one another,’” smiling, “may I transfer it to Sherburne House? We do not always pay our debts to the one who has stood in our stead, but to someone else who needs. I have thought a good deal of the time when there would be two mistresses here. It is inevitable. Whether such family wills are just right—but it was an old-fashioned way of doing things. It seemed

equitable, too, when a daughter had devoted all her life and best energies to a place and family, that she should not be turned out in her old age to make a new home."

"Oh, Aunt Jue! we settled all that, and don't you remember she asked the Murrays of her own kindly desire? And while she lives everything shall keep on in the same fashion, and she shall have the authority. I don't really care for that. I have the freedom to ask anybody. And she was very good in that matter of Anita Garcia. Oh, you need never feel afraid!"

Dell's voice trembled with emotion.

"I think you are truly friends. But May and December have different qualities, different needs. What nature could not do in uniting them, grace has. But the grace will be sufficient for all time, and that we are apt to forget. My dear, old people are not always agreeable. There come frost and snow on the blooms of May, but if the soul is warm they soon melt. No two people ever agree in all things. It is a good way to take the points of concurrence and make much of them, and let the others go. The sharpness often gets rubbed off them. I can see you have acquired a good deal of the wisdom that comes by effort, which is one kind of experience."

"I do hope I have," the girl said, with an eagerness that thrilled in every pulse.

"Some time you may marry."

Dell flushed in a protesting way, but Aunt Julia gave a meaning smile and went on:

"We all hope you will. There ought to be a bright, joyful, growing household here. And marriage does seem the crown of womanhood. What dignity can be

higher than wifehood and motherhood in all their blessedness? You may not think so now, but I consider you especially fitted for it. And you must feel free to bring here your best love and desires——”

“Oh, Aunt Jue!” she interrupted, with a scarlet face, “I don’t want to think of that.”

“Do not think of it, my dear, but I believe it is every young girl’s dream. It is unnatural at your age to deny love, and face the possibility of a single life, unless one has a great genius for compensation. The genius of most women consists in their capacity for loving. You can afford to wait and take nothing short of the very best. God is getting it ready for you. It would be a great disappointment to Aunt Aurelia if there were not some of the old blood in the place. We all want you to be very happy.”

Dell hid her face on the motherly bosom. The old wish had not died out of anyone’s mind, she knew that. They were all very proud of Leonard. Since it was evident Anita Garcia had chosen for herself, and wisely at that, the episode had lost its importance in everyone’s estimation, and been condoned as an ordinary youthful mistake. Even Dr. Carew admitted that a splendid voice belonged to the world.

“And now, dear,” Aunt Julia began, after a long pause, “suppose I take advantage of your kind proffer—if you think you can get along with two old ladies. Aunt Aurelia has spoken of it, and insists this was one of the reasons for her inviting Cousin Carrick for the winter. But I am afraid of giving you too much to do. The children——”

“Oh, Aunt Jue! I love the children. You can surely trust them to me! So, then,” with a touch of mirthfulness, “I was not first in the field with my

plan. The doctor suggested it. I cannot honestly lay claim to it. But if *I* should persuade you to go!"

"My dear, I think your oversight of the children *would* persuade me. It would not be so complete a rest to take even Baby Floyd."

"Then you *will* go?"

"I would like to, I confess. I will consider it seriously. I should be back before the holidays, and in time for your journey."

"Never mind about mine."

Aunt Julia kissed her tenderly. Then the letters came in, and it was time for supper. Afterward Dell read aloud.

But when she had gone to her own room she could not quite dismiss the old idea from her mind. It really seemed as if her husband—she flushed deeply at the thought—must be a welcome master in Beaumanoir. And if this other vague dream had any substance, it would change everything to her. She would be compelled to go away. Someone must come and keep the lovely old home from falling to ruin, and she shuddered as she thought of the Carrick estate. There was no one who would take the pride that Leonard had always felt for it. If she were going quite away, blessedly happy, she might offer it to her cousin—the old childish desire when she was such a miserable little stranger within its gates. But would Leonard accept it on any terms but one?

Lyndell Sherburne knew he would not. Even if he should marry, and she should be living here alone fifteen or twenty years from now, would *they* come; would a city-bred wife be happy here? She would be an old-maid cousin, and the children—his children—would be the heirs.

It was not an alluring picture. There was the other side. She had persuaded herself less than two years ago that she could love him, that it was in some sort her duty to marry him. To-day he was a stronger, finer man. She always gave thanks that he had gone his way so steadily after the *esclandre*.

Would she ever find a place to live this high and satisfying life of broad opportunity, to build herself up in the sweet forgetfulness of a true and noble affection, to keep near to lofty counsel, to give it, to see the work of her hands, the thoughts of her brain radiate to other living centers? If she could not have this, what then? Did it matter so very much? Yes, it did *now*, because hope dies hard in youth, but in the years to come? Would not the keen longing be softened? Was not something else often put in the place of the thing one ardently desired, and fitted so nicely there was no room for friction?

Leonard's wife would have a nice social position and influence. Could not she do her good work with the consciousness that others were made happy?

The old motive that she had discarded with a girl's disdain! She could not just now put the lesser, lower thing in the place of her high enthusiastic dreams. She might relinquish them, but the other was too much of a sacrifice for her to consider at present.

Then she smiled to herself alone in the dark, with her face on the pillow. She did not have to live next year, and the year after, just this winter. There was something else to do, and she could do it in wholesome, heartsome earnest.

CHAPTER XIV.

TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW.

THERE were so many things in the way, when Aunt Jue came to look at them, that she wavered very much. When one has filled a place excellently, one almost comes to the conclusion that he or she cannot be spared. The rut is so narrow that getting out may be a troublesome process. But when Uncle Dick came up for a few days the matter was settled in a man's definite fashion.

Cousin Carrick came over and joined in the general conclusion, glad to be of service at once. And Aunt Aurelia said to Dell:

"Suppose you ask Tessy Murray down? We two old ladies shall be company for each other, and it will be pleasant for you to have someone."

"Yes," returned Dell eagerly; "that will be just delightful."

The children's nurse had but lately come up from the quarters. Her husband had deserted her nearly two years before, and her baby had died. She was six-and-twenty, and had done dressmaking and general sewing both before and after marriage. Aunt Julia had taken a warm interest in her during her misfortunes, and she had proved not ungrateful.

But they claimed Dell in a most arbitrary fashion. She came every morning to see that they were in order, and to "kiss them like mamma." She often

drove them to school, and then did errands, or went into town and made some calls. Then in the evening she must read to them and hear lessons and talk about what papa and mamma were doing. Or she must write their letters, which, if she had used all the materials, would have been volumes.

"We love you so, Cousin Dell," was the continual refrain; "next best to mamma"; or she was "almost as good or almost as pretty as mamma."

"Miss Dell jes spile dem chillen," said Ellen, with a dubious shake of the hand.

She took up the near things, the little things. She watched Millicent, in her pretty household ways, sewing for her little girl, teaching her lessons, taking her out, making neighborly calls, listening to sorrows, ministering in her sweet fashion to people who told over tiresome troubles, things that had happened to them years ago, that should have been packed up and laid by, but they seemed to keep them fresh as happenings of yesterday. And all this when she could create a wonderful world of brain people, who were doing and saying bright, new things.

"Do you really like it?" she asked one day. "It tires me, when Cousin Carrick begins on the interminable subjects of long ago, the petty little round, the tucks they put in their gowns, and the years she wore her leghorn hat, and the times she had the ribbon dyed over, and the people who came to tea, the kinds of cake and all. I want live things, what people are doing to-day."

"What they did yesterday laps over into to-day. And did you ever think our to-day will be old sometime? Yet what we did and suffered may be the great thing to us then."

"But I want to go on with the world. I hate to stand still. And if I had some grand things to give I should want to be listened to."

Millicent smiled. "The others have a right to talk part of the time. And if no one wanted to listen to *us*, Dell?"

"But the old things are not always better? And if we go back continually, how are we to get on?"

"Do we need to get on so fast?"

"But you have the thought to comfort you——" then Dell stopped and flushed.

"No, I am not quite sure of success. Papa is afraid I may build too much on it and get disappointed."

That was not what Dell meant. She was glad, though, that Millicent did not catch the real import; it savored almost of impertinence.

"And it is true that the greater, the more infrequent, things of life should not make us dissatisfied with the smaller round, since we have to live in it. We could not stand the rarefied air of the mountain tops all the time. I am not sure but we women are in danger of growing too restless."

"But if everybody was satisfied, where would the improvements come in? And you can't deny that the world grows the richer for them."

"When they are true."

"We are to 'prove all things.' And you must try them to prove them!" declared Dell confidently.

"And hold fast only of them that are 'good.' Sometimes I think we don't really inquire about the goodness. We hold fast because we like them."

"Can you make yourself like anything?"

"We need not hold fast of things that are not best for us."

"But how to tell?" A puzzled crease came in the girl's smooth forehead.

"We are allowed our own way sometimes until we see the mistake very clearly. And then we have to go back."

Dell sighed a little. She had been disappointed in Tessy Murray's letter. They had some friends staying in the house, and there was to be a fair for a new day nursery just started. Tessy had said: "If you could be here!" And then, as she had gone upstairs, she saw a letter lying on Millicent's desk, the pale gray business envelope with Dr. Carew's name printed across the end. It was quite a bulky inclosure and had a double stamp.

"Come and play a duet," Millicent said a moment later. "Perhaps Cousin Carrick's reminiscences have bored you too much. And out of some of the incidents she related here, and a bit of her sister's long ago experience, I am making a pretty story. Suppose twenty, fifty, or a hundred people really care to read it? Here is a touching bit of music—German. They seem to get a depth of feeling, or else they have a tender association for me."

The playing quite restored Dell. Mr. Beaumanoir came and listened, and when they rose put an arm about each. He loved her very much, Dell often realized.

When she took the children home Cousin Eliza sat knitting lace, and this time it was Aunt Aurelia who was talking. How she had gone to Washington when a little girl, with her mother, when Mr. Van Buren was president, and Miss Virginia Floyd, a cousin of some degree, was a great belle, and the beautiful gown she wore.

Dell looked at Cousin Carrick, who merely glanced up and nodded. But the young girl gave her a sort of scrutinizing smile, and wondered a little.

What had Millicent seen in this elderly, faded woman; with her thin hair combed a little over the tips of her ears, making no attempt to hide the fine wrinkles in her forehead; her nose drooping more year by year as the roundness and fullness of cheeks and lips had gone; the faded eyes with their thin rims and sparse lashes; the angular shoulders and flat chest—what had she seen to make a story out of? Some long-gone prettiness, some incident of life and love, maybe. But to be put in a story! It was like the sweetness of rose leaves laid away long before, scenting some rare old laces. She had whiffs of it sometimes when Aunt Aurelia took them out.

Miss Sherburne looked up and smiled. She had a curious youthfulness at this moment, born of old remembrances. What a subtle charm they had, if they could so rejuvenate one!

“Well, did you get your letter?” asked Aunt Aurelia.

“Oh, yes.” Dell’s face lost a touch of brightness. “But Tessy cannot come just now. They have a house full of company.”

“Oh, I am sorry for your disappointment!”

“Nothing has been taken away from me,” said Dell archly. “Perhaps we can’t expect things being added to all the time.”

“Tessy!” repeated Cousin Carrick. She had a great fashion of doing this, and it often annoyed the girl of modern breeding. “Tessy! Do you mean that little Murray girl who was here last summer? I was so pleased with her. Is her name just Tessy?”

"Maybe it's Teresa," returned Dell. "But I never heard her called anything else, and she always writes it that way."

"She is such a blithe, bonny little thing. Poor dear Maria said after we went home how delightful it would be to have someone like that live with you! She isn't flippant, nor full of the restless new ideas. We found them all stirred up in Baltimore; turning the world over, I call it; finding the old things that somehow had been sifted through to the bottom, and convinced they had made wonderful discoveries. *Do* you like it, Relie?"

"The old things are good enough for my time," returned Miss Sherburne. "But maybe if I was twenty—when I was twenty I had all the fresh, new things of that time."

Her voice softened a little and she smiled across to Dell. After a moment she added: "You must get Milly to come over and help make it up to you."

Dell came around to Miss Sherburne and put her soft hand on the shoulder that had kept more roundness than Miss Carrick's.

"Don't you think I ought to be making some things up to myself? I mustn't be a baby all my life and look for people to come in to amuse me. I must be storing up the right kind of things for my old age."

"Yes, the restless young people are bad enough, but there is the hope they will get done seething and settle down. But the restless old people who are never content! I think it a good thing we learned to knit lace and do embroidery, and fine sewing and darning in our young days. We didn't feel so troubled as to how the world was to get on. It's the Lord's world, and he will take care of it."

"But oughtn't we help a little?" ventured Dell.

"We can help our neighbor. And if everyone looked out to do the best he could for his neighbor the world would get on very well. Why, it would all be helped."

"The kingdom of heaven is within you." She wanted to bring in the kingdom of the earth as well. She wanted so many things in her little world. She had started out to make everything beautiful and sweet right here at Sherburne House, and she was wearying of it when there was no little court about her.

She sat down on an ottoman and folded her hands on Aunt Aurelia's knee. The autumnal dusk was coming on, and golden brown lights quivered and faded, then flickered up a moment to fade again until they all went out.

Miss Carrick began about something far off—a dress her sister-in-law had sent her from Paris, cut in the latest style, but before she had time to make it up it had gone quite out of date.

"We were not going to grand dinners and all that. I've often thought if she had sent the goods in the whole piece; but she always wanted the latest fashion, and she never seemed to think what might be suitable for her wouldn't be of much account to us. Your clothes want to fit the place you're in."

Didn't one's life want to fit the place she or he was in? The fitness was not for all time. Clothes had to be made over; one's duties were not quite the same in one place as another. Really, when you came to think of it, was not this the outgrowth that broadened life?

Some little feet came pattering along the hall. Dell sprang up.

"We're all clean and nice for supper," declared Floyd, and, at that moment the great bell sounded.

After the lessons and the putting to bed, Dell came and read a while, a common, pretty story of every day, with no strenuous endeavor as most of her favorite heroines had.

She thought of Tessy Murray, blithe and bonny. That just expressed it. Dr. Carew took great comfort in her, too. She remembered one evening when he had dropped in and said:

"I'm tired to death talking and doing, and I have to give a lecture at half-past eight to a boys' club. So I have dropped in to rest. Won't one of you girls play something soft and sweet, and not feel hurt if I go to sleep?"

Tessy had played some soft old ballads. She had a way of playing the air with an accompaniment that was exceedingly delightful. Why, it almost seemed as if Bertram might—and there were so many opportunities to see Tessy!

Dell dropped on her knees and prayed in the wordless manner people do in times of great trial or great temptation. The thing that was not for her must be put out of her life. The thing that was, a noble and tender friendship, must be accepted without any heart-burning. It would be easier to go away for a long while and get used to seeing some other soul happy, with that far, pure insight. It would entail less envying and pain than to look on with craving bodily eyes. But it would be more courageous to live it down once for all.

Milly came over the next morning with Nora and some white aprons she was finishing daintily for

Fanny. "I was cross and out of sorts yesterday," Dell said, in a rapid breath, with her greeting.

What a pleasant time they had! There was the late gleam of Indian summer still pervading the landscape. They would linger at intervals for a long while. Miss Carrick enjoyed the drive so much, and the friendly calls. She never complained of having been confined so much with her sister or the narrowness of her life, but she entered with a certain subdued joy into this that was so much wider.

"Really," she declared one day, "I shall get spoiled. But I dare say there will be so much bother patching up the old house next summer and getting the garden put in half decent shape; and so many complaints from the old folks"—all the negroes that had remained with her were old—"that I shall hardly know how to turn. Keeping busy is a good thing when there's all Egypt to hanker after."

Aunt Jue's letters were merry and delightful. If they could spare her, she would like to go down to Savannah with the major, and that would lengthen her stay to six weeks. But she would be home in time for the Christmas preparations.

Christmas! That startled Dell. Had the autumn gone like that? What was Tessy doing?

"We must send out our invitations," said Aunt Aurelia. "I don't know what we will do for young people!"

Mrs. Longworth had begun her new society round, but being in mourning she affected literary and artistic people mostly, with now and then the scientific. They secretly bored her, but it gave tone. And when some quite distinguished person said to the stately young society woman: "I hardly knew how

to find the time to come, but I was sure of meeting such delightful people. You must possess some occult charm to get them together," she felt her efforts had not been in vain. But they were going to have a Christmas entertainment.

Leonard would come home. Fanny wanted to visit a school friend, Ned had an invitation to a "house party," and was engaged for private theatricals. How they did miss Violet and Mr. Amory, who would be in St. Petersburg. Alice was happy, but wanted Dell to help her enjoy it. Miss Ashton was expected in January.

"Tessy would be sure to come," Dell thought. Her letters were so full of everything, and everyone longed for Dell. But in the midst of the plans she received one that puzzled her, with the effort visible in every line, and its unusual brevity.

Some friends of Mr. Murray's were going to San Francisco on the 20th of December, and would take her. Con was expected in March, and would bring her, or *them*, home. It was a short notice, but could not Dell come up to New York and go with her? The visit would not be half as nice without her.

Lyndell was utterly amazed. Nothing certain had been planned. They were to talk it over when Tessy came to Sherburne.

"I can't understand it!" she said to Aunt Aurelia. "Unless—it may be some choice friends, and the visit in San Francisco——" pausing thoughtfully.

"But you could join her!"

Aunt Aurelia's voice was low, and while it did not express dissent was not enthusiastic.

"And Aunt Jue will not be home until the 21st."

"As if we couldn't be left alone a day or two!"

"It isn't that, altogether." She would not find fault with Tessy's abruptness, but she felt it keenly. "I hate to be hurried off with such a short warning. I like to think about a journey and have the little fuss of getting ready. No," quite emphatically, "I shall not go. I shall stay and keep the feast with you."

Miss Sherburne kissed her tenderly. She had resigned herself to the fact of the Murrays always being in some respects her rivals. But to be preferred—— "See what Millicent advises," she said, with a voice full of emotion.

Nothing would have shaken Dell's resolution after that. "I am afraid Milly will not advise," she returned half humorously, "and I shall be thrown back on my own resources. You may as well take my decision now."

She read her letter over again and it still puzzled her. Tessy explained rather elaborately that the plan had just been settled, and apologized for the short notice. They could not take such a journey alone. Mr. and Mrs. Arnold were ready, and she was to spend a fortnight with them in San Francisco. They would be very happy to entertain her friend Miss Sherburne. And she, Tessy, was so eager to see Alice and Lady Ashton.

"There is something the matter with it," Dell said, almost indignantly to herself. "It doesn't ring true. You can see the effort at explanation. I shouldn't force myself in anywhere, and if she has friends she prefers to me——"

Lyndell's heart swelled, and her eyes filled with tears. She had counted so on Tessy coming to them. Miss Carrick was longing to see her. It was a sort of golden season with Aunt Aurelia that Dell hated to

have her miss. And though she made friends easily, there were not many dear intimate ones beside her cousins. She did so want to see Alice in the new home she was so enthusiastic about. But the visit was spoiled for her, and she could not just tell why.

"Try and persuade her to go," Aunt Aurelia said to Millicent. "Aunt Julia will feel very sorry if she learns that her extra fortnight has prevented such a gratification."

Milly found her curiously firm. She was too loyal to Tessy to confess her at the bottom of the discomposure.

"It isn't complimentary for you to want to get rid of me!" she exclaimed, with a pretense of indignation, while a smile shone through it. "I am just getting settled in the traces, and used to the quaint old-fashioned family carriage. We are going along so smoothly, finding pleasant little nooks, and resting under shady trees, where we have nice talks and those spaces of silence that often hold a deeper meaning than mere words. I want to feel that Sherburne House is my real home, and that I may live here for years. Heretofore it has been only a stopping place, not the best of all!"

"Oh, if you feel that way!" Millicent's eyes kindled. "My dear, a change *has* come over you. For a while you were not happy. I thought you might be trying new theories or beliefs, or having some ambitions that needed a wider sphere. But papa was speaking of it a few days ago—he had been over, dining with you—and he said: 'Lyndell is getting beautifully fitted to Sherburne House, and Aunt Aurelia to her.'"

"Did he say that?" Dell flushed with pleasure.

"It is what I want. Sherburne House may be my home always." Her voice had a little tremble in it that the elder detected but took no note of. "I am trying earnestly to be content and wait God's time for any new thing he has appointed."

There *had* been a struggle. Millicent wondered a little. Immediate resignation had never been one of Dell's qualities. Her nature was too strong, too impatient of results.

"Dell," suddenly, "I shouldn't wonder if in the spring papa and I went out to California. Mamma confesses that her traveling fever is over. Papa is anxious to see Gifford, though he is doing very well. So the journey may only be delayed."

"Oh, Milly! what a delight! Hereafter I mean to earn my pleasures. I do want to be a comfort to everybody after all the trouble you have taken with me."

They were all gratified to have her relinquish the visit so readily, and throw herself so cheerfully into the Christmas preparation. Aunt Julia and the major came home in the best of spirits. She had regained her roses and her dimples, and was her usual self.

"I can never thank you sufficiently," she declared to Dell. "Cousin Carrick thinks I may go again, and is quite sure she can give Aunt Aurelia the proper companionship and that you have hardly missed me," smiling to the brown eyes that smiled back again.

"I shall not be so uncomplimentary. But I am glad for the good time."

Something else came up in her mind that she could not confess. She had been taking her pleasure without considering how much of it belonged to another. There were many lovely things that belonged by right

to Aunt Julia. In the years to come she must give back as had been given to her. She saw so many duties, and she meant they should have full opportunity to do their work.

The man in the house made a great change; a bright breeziness. The little boys were wild over papa. There would be no school for almost a fortnight, but they had plans enough to keep him busy. He sat and chatted with Aunt Aurelia with a child on each knee, and reminded Dell of her first Christmas at Sherburne House. He teased her, too, and was very fond of her. They had some good gallops together, and many bright talks.

If Christmas was not so much of a family party, it included many of the old friends: Mr. Whittingham, looking thinner and older, and seeming more punctilious; young Kirby, who was somehow settling to the same quiet ways, the doctor and Miss Carew, and a few others.

Leonard had come down the night before, but he was over early the next morning, with such merry wishes and jests that he seemed to bring an atmosphere of sunshine with him. Dell and Milly had been so busy with the gifts that they had to take part of the morning to distribute them. So it was almost dinner time when she came down to greet the guests. Her happy, smiling face was full of joy.

Leonard took her out to dinner. It gave her a kind of importance that kept the quick color coming and going. Spencer Kirby had been deep in a talk with Millicent; he and Leonard were the only young men. Then it was still a foregone conclusion that Dell would marry her cousin. And certainly he was a young man to be proud of.

She caught a word of what Dr. Carew was saying to Milly.

"He expected to, but at the last moment there was an important operation he thought he could not afford to miss. But he will be down during the holidays."

Milly smiled and nodded. Did she know already? Dell thought so.

The dinner was at three, and they sat a long while over the table. There was to be no dancing or evening festivities. Dell had refused all gayeties and wanted just the family party.

There were many things for the elders to talk about.

"They haven't all the old times," said Leonard, in a low tone. "Do you remember the first Christmas you were here?"

Dell turned scarlet.

"How we have scattered to the four quarters of the globe, almost! And I thought you would be away. Were you not going to California with Miss Murray?"

"I did think of it, yes. I did not suppose she was going so soon. We meant to have her down here."

"Yes, her departure was sudden." Leonard colored. Then he looked half furtively at Dell. "I thought you were inseparables," he added.

"But you see we have separated."

"Did you quarrel, girl fashion?" He did not look at her then; he seemed half listening to his father.

"No," said Dell shortly.

"But—were you not surprised?"

"Yes, I *was* surprised at first. But you know Tessy is in no wise answerable to me, and, small as she is, she has a mind of her own."

"Dell, I hope you never will be anything but friends, dear friends."

"Why, we shall always be friends! I can't imagine anything happening. And if you could really understand all the past——"

"I do understand a good deal of it. I am proud of the stand you took; your loyalty through trials that would have discouraged any other girl. And I am doubly glad they have proved worthy of it. The old narrowness of the world is abating, and men are judging a man more by what he is. But Mr. Murray would stand a good many tests. They have some fine friends. Con, I hear, is quite a brilliant young man. Mr. Murray may justly be proud of his sons."

Mr. Beaumanoir was making a little speech, and Dell soon found it was in her honor. She bent over to listen, and the bright color came to her cheeks. And then he proposed the health of the future mistress of Sherburne House.

Was Miss Sherburne really smiling down to her? Leonard rose and answered.

"The next family gathering under this hospitable roof," her uncle resumed, "will be to induct Miss Lyndell Sherburne into her new dignities, April next, when she comes of age. And in behalf of the whole family, who have learned to love her so well, we will wish her a long and happy life."

Dell bowed, but her eyes were full of tears. Why, it seemed almost like deposing Aunt Aurelia. How really sweet and gracious she looked in her black velvet gown and fine laces!

When they rose from the table Dell went straight down to her and took both hands. She wore her beautiful diamond ring to-night, and the flash of it

made a long ray over the young girl, like a star of guidance.

"Oh, Aunt Aurelia!" she cried softly, but with a deep, penetrative earnestness, "how could Uncle Beaumanoir——"

"My child, I asked him to. He said nothing but the truth. Shall we love each other any less when we have changed places? I do believe we have learned our lesson too well. And I want you to have many happy years. You believe that, do you not?"

"I shall try to make them happy. And I want to make you happy as well."

"My dear child, you have, you do. You have won your father's place."

They had been going on to the great drawing room. A fire of logs was burning brightly, and the chairs were in cozy groups for two or three to sit down and talk.

Miss Carrick glanced up as Dell passed by her chair, and held her arm with gentle pressure.

"Relia just worshiped your father," she said. "And it seems strange like, considering all the circumstances, for there were so many grandchildren, and they've all turned out so splendidly, that she should love you best of all. I didn't suppose she'd ever be willing to give up, and she's just as sweet about it as if she had never had all the power. Oh, my dear! don't disappoint her in anything."

"She shall never have to give up anything. I am going to be Miss Sherburne, her handmaiden," and Dell smiled winsomely.

Then Mr. Whittingham caught her as she was leaving Miss Carrick and began to talk about her coming birthday. The Christmas feast seemed to revolve

about that. Surely this time she was put in her right place.

Even the doctor said presently, with the funny twinkle in his eye: "Miss Sherburne of Sherburne House."

Dell's only reply was a grave smile.

"The duties of life come upon us whether we will or not. We may run away, but we cannot escape them. Jonah had to preach his sermon all the same, and then he was angry because it had the desired effect. We have to wait and be patient even when we have done our best. God doesn't crown our efforts at once."

"If we could always tell which was the best," the girl said slowly. "I have thought a great many times Sherburne House wasn't best for me, and yet it was mine, whether or no. Oh, do you remember all the old times and the rebellions? Yet it has brought me so much pleasure, so many splendid gratifications, that I could not regret it. And now I am coming to look upon the duties, to be truly a daughter of the house. For I have had a great deal of love given me."

How sweet and brave she looked! Was there another love that had redeemed and purified itself, and was making a gift worthy of acceptance? There was a little fatherly pang as Leonard joined them. How much the handsome, imperious face had improved. Had the soul not made some strides as well?

The doctor moved away, and joined Mrs. Kirby.

"What a splendid young couple they make!" she said, not glancing directly at them, but singling them out by her words.

Could Lyndell make any mistake now?

"They want us to sing," he said. "Milly is hunting up some Christmas music. How curiously one's very soul gets stirred with emotions and resolves. Dell, are you magnanimous enough to forgive the mistakes and follies and tyrannies of—it is six years or more since we had our first meeting and our first quarrel. But to-night I would like to feel that we were real friends, that we might do for each other the nobler and less selfish things sincere Friendship holds as her divine right. Let us begin a new compact."

Dell raised her eyes with a great effort. And yet, some far intuition brought a firm conviction his were not lover's eyes. His face had a calm, high resolve, yet it was not eager or importunate.

"We have been foes, we have met under flags of armed truce; you were my brave, generous savior in that time of doubt and trial; we have quarreled; we have been cousins and lovers, but never real friends. At least, the highest friendliness has been on your side. Dell, I owe you a great deal, and I want an honest chance of paying in the coin of true respect and brotherly love."

That certainly was not a lover's tone. Was it only a beginning to lead to the same end? Milly called her in a soft voice, a little raised but not loud.

"Yes, we will be friends," she made answer.

CHAPTER XV.

KINSFOLK AND FRIENDS.

EVERY day or evening there were neighborhood festivities, and the Sherburne young people were in continual demand. Millicent was having a second girlhood. One could hardly believe she had gone through the octave of a woman's life. There were the fine, distinguishing marks that a well-used experience gives, but she had not had time to settle into them; she never would now, because she was always reaching out to gather the next sweetness. The young girls who had been "big children" at her marriage hovered about her and waited for her plans; and occasionally someone said "Miss Millicent." "Mrs. Von Lindorm" seemed the name belonging to another life.

What was it gave her the power and attractiveness? When she went away again, as she would sometimes, this very ability and pleasantness should by right belong to Miss Sherburne. Was it not the old dream of doing something, of calling in people to feasts? She would have a good deal to give. There would be no family claims as there had been on Miss Aurelia. Single women unconsciously narrowed their lives as they lost the flavor of youth. She knew it was not quite what she desired, but could she not keep hers broad?

There was something right before her. She had

taken it up with a girl's eager generosity, quite forgetful of self. Because God had not allowed her to do it in that manner, was it a token that it must never be done at all?

Leonard and she were going to and fro all the time. He was her shadow, but the sort of unaggressive shadow the moon makes on summer nights. At midwinter the clear, frosty air helps it to define the smallest bare twig. Not always alone, Leonard was a great delight to the young girls, and he danced generously with them. But by common consent he was given to Dell.

She had never felt more at ease with him. There was a curious half abstraction that softened him very much, made him less dominant. He talked of his plans, his aims; and very clear-sighted they were. They even stirred her pride in him.

Could she come to any certain satisfaction in the old plans? Would he be large enough in the full measure of his development to satisfy her longings, or could she tone her aspirations so as to meet him halfway?

Young Carew came down in the midst of the holiday pleasure, bringing the first installment of Millicent's story. What a precious secret it was! They did not even take Leonard into that; everybody had been proscribed but Dell. Uncle Beaumanoir hardly knew whether to be proud or not. His old-fashioned opinions held out against the modern advance of thought.

They had quite a family party at the Beaumanoirs'. Bertram's stay was to be so brief that the other old friends had to be content with calls.

"Were you not surprised at Miss Murray's sudden

journey?" he asked Dell. "I thought you were going with her."

"We had talked it over. But the notice was so short. And I was away most of last winter, you know."

"I didn't understand it at all. It isn't like the same house. Dell, did you ever think what a curious pervasive power Tessy Murray has? When she settles things, events, people begin to revolve about her."

There was an eager brightness in Bertram's eyes. Violet had once said he was fond of dissecting mental connections.

"Why——" Dell paused to consider. "She had that as a child. It wasn't anything she ever tried to do, either. Everything came to her. Perhaps it was her sweet temper."

"There are other sweet-tempered women, with no special attractive force. It is something outside of that—the power of making a center, of harmonizing, blending. It might not show in the rush of fashionable life, but she never aims at fashion, yet society people come and take her up. Socially the Murrays are great successes. There is so much change in a big city. I have to laugh when one little set arrogates supreme power and sweeps away all others with a wave of its hand. There are many centers, and circles are widening out all the time. There are money and pleasure and birth and breeding; there are music and intelligence, and life is so short you can't take them all in; so you must elect which you will serve, or you may float around on the outer edges, and drift all your forty or fifty years. I'm not sure but that the specialty business will be our salvation. The doing

of one thing well, rather than a great many things poorly."

"You think, then, Miss Murray has found her gift," Leonard said. "Making a home, perhaps: making people happy. It is a pretty big thing in this world, after all."

"One of the greatest things, one of the most abused things as well. For we all look to be made happy, and some day she may be chosen just for that purpose. I wonder how much courage she would have to resist, if she was chosen by someone she liked very much."

"Why should she resist?" Leonard asked the question with fretted utterance. "Bert, you let your ideas about the new woman run away with you! What the world needs most is homes with brave, sweet, pure women in them."

"We have had them a long while—your mother, my aunt, who has been mother to ever so many. Thank Heaven! they do not go very much out of fashion."

"But you are trying your best to push them out as fast as possible, to make them doctors and clerks and professors." His tone was sharp and resentful.

"Because no man has come along to marry them," laughed Bertram—"no man they would be the better for marrying. But too many are coaxed and persuaded or tempted to take some poor fellow, who turns to a brute and leaves them to provide for a family. I see so much of it. The girl who has money may not need to go out washing quite so soon. Yet she may be slowly drilled into a slave with a persistent master. Women have an enormous capacity for self-sacrifice."

"I don't see what this has to do with Tessy Murray.

Dell, why don't you stand up for your friend? And she is such a sweet little thing!"

"If she finds a man like her father her sweetness will not be wasted. There are other qualities to her, however, and education has developed and strengthened them. Her mother has all the sweetness, but it fell into good hands. I have never known a lovelier mother. I wonder what she would have done if it had been different? But it simply wasn't. I am very much interested to see what Miss Tessy will make of her life. I have come to know her so well; better, no doubt, than any of you, beside Lyndell."

Dell flushed a little and glanced at Millicent, who wore a rather abstracted air. Leonard was plainly out of humor. He had admired pretty Tessy very much in the autumn, she remembered. Or was it simply because he could not bear his ideas traversed?

Had there been anything unusual in Tessy's departure? If so, had it not been—oh, what if Tessy had seen this possibility, or her father's clearer eyes discerned it for her? Bertram and she had been such friends, such co-workers. Yes, there was more than sweetness to her.

Would Leonard dwarf the woman who came into his life? But were all women's lives laid on great lines? All men's were not. There was an infinitude of common people; and, since she had no special gift, must she not be content to remain one, and do her good in the little round? Millicent did not disdain it. And how strange it seemed that just when she was settling to a kind of happiness in everyday life, some chance talk should disturb her—Bertram's talk, often.

They left themselves, however, and went at other

topics. Carew said his good-by; he was to take a midnight train.

"You will come up to New York?" he said, holding Dell's hand. "You and Millicent. There is really no doubt of her success," smiling a little as he added, "it may be hard to get out of the old boundaries, but her patience and lovingness will prove that a woman may be a genius and the highest type of woman, at that. We want a good many of the higher ones. There will be some famous people for you both to see later on." Then he seemed to linger. "Do not hurry life too much."

That was scarcely more than a whisper.

The three talked a little after they reached home. There were times when Bertram wished his father had not been so steadfast to the one memory and had married again; that there had been other children, girls, so many there would be nothing left to wish for. He was sorry, now that he had to go away.

Aunt Neale put up a lunch in the daintiest manner. He would like it instead of a railroad breakfast. She kissed him good-night; then he and his father retired to the old study and smoked and talked. How many times the son had said: "If I had you with me! But I am counting on your extreme old age to have a little of you." And now they talked medical lore and new things.

"It is almost like a post-graduate course," the old doctor said to his sister.

Then they drove to the station. The night was dark and overcast, but the horse needed no guidance.

"It is hard, but I think I am right," Bertram said. "There is the inheritance. If she were quite poor! And I can never decide how sharp a wrench it would

be to tear up all the fibers that have intertwined with the people as well as the place."

"But if she should make a mistake?" The father's tone had a pang in it.

"I do not think God will let her. If he means to have her belong here always—it will be his work, and he will bring it to the perfect fruit. I can't hope; I can't do anything but just wait."

Then they wrung each other's hands and parted.

Leonard went over to Sherburne House with the two old ladies and the young one, and stayed all night. It was so like home. He was gracious and charming again.

The letters came just after breakfast, and a foreign one for Miss Carrick from her brother. It was brief, but it brought a flush to her thin cheek.

"Leonard——" she looked up in distress.

"Well, can I come to your assistance?" His bright, handsome face was a tower of encouragement in itself.

"Fred writes—see here—about selling the place. It is so many years since he has seen it, and he hasn't any idea that values have shrunk to nothing. Must I? He says, put it in someone's hands, and——"

The color deepened in her face, and her eyes were tearful as she handed him the letter.

It was the acknowledgment of the news of his sister's death, as if it had been that of almost any indifferent person. And he suggested that the estate be sold, as she would not want to live there alone. His half could be forwarded to him and would come very welcome. His health was a good deal broken, and he had no dependence but his daughter.

"I am afraid he will be disappointed if he has

counted on very much," and Leonard gave a dry, scornful laugh. "You might *give* it away, Cousin Carrick; but there are so many better estates—old homes begging for purchasers."

"It isn't that—altogether." Her voice had the strained sound of crying in it, and yet she was fighting against the inclination. "Why, I wouldn't have any home myself," in surprise.

"You wouldn't? What's Beaumanoir—and Sherburne House? And some day I may marry and have a home. Don't you fear but that there will be homes enough for you."

She gave a soft little hysterical laugh and looked at him with shining eyes. The tears and gratitude made them young for a moment.

"Don't worry! See here, I will answer the business part of it; and you can refer him to me."

"If he wanted to come home and live! But he never will. And I don't know how I am ever going to get along alone. There are the servants, to be sure."

"You will not go home before spring, Eliza; and between this and that the way will be made clear," said Aunt Aurelia, in a tone of kindly firmness. "But it is true, as Leonard says; so many of the old places have gone to decay and have little value in them."

"It took me so by surprise"—half in apology. "But I do suppose it was right after all. There's never been anything done about the place. We each had a third, of course, and now poor Maria's gone, it is easier still to divide; especially as he thought I would not want to live there."

She was ashamed of the selfishness that could make such a quick grasp. Her own brother, too!

"Yes, I'll answer this." Leonard took out his

pencil and wrote down the address, and gave it another rather scornful glance. Then he looked over at Dell. She had a long letter in a pretty girlish hand, that was neither Italian nor modern, but beautiful, dainty.

"From California?"

"Yes, Tessy," she made answer. "She is having the loveliest time in San Francisco with the Arnolds."

There was no constraint about this letter. It was brimful of all the little and big entertaining sights and events that Tessy's bright eyes always saw. If Dell could only be there!

They left the table presently. The ladies went upstairs. Leonard followed Dell.

"Atrocious, wasn't it? that letter from Mr. Carrick? Even if there had been thousands in the place, he might have waited a decent time before pressing a settlement. Father says it will never do for her to go back there. She is a nice, pleasant old body."

Dell laughed with an odd remembrance.

"It's queer, but Tessy Murray proposed, last summer, that when"—Dell lowered her tone unconsciously—"when Miss Maria was gone she should come here. No, she suggested it. I think if Tessy Murray had Sherburne House, she would by and by turn it into a home for old ladies—she's so fond of them. And she seems to find so many nice ones. Or babies! She haunts day nurseries. She gets poor women to make clothes, and gives them away, so her goodness goes twice around."

"Carew is mightily afraid she'll fall in love with someone. I lost my temper last night. Dell, you don't imagine—and she has had such opportunities——"

Dell's face was scarlet.

"Carew doesn't need any such kind of a wife. Tessy isn't an intellectual woman, nor a strong-minded woman, but just the sweet, household sort of body that would make some man very happy, but she would be wasted on Carew."

"Oh, Len! and you like him so! You have always been such friends. And he——"

"Yes, between you both you brought me back to life and sense. Oh, I am not going to forget that. But——"

He looked long and earnestly at Dell. Some surprise kept her quite mute. An underlying, intangible thought or suspicion haunted her and refused to take shape. He turned away, walked over to the window, as if he had resolved upon something, and then changed his mind.

But he began again suddenly:

"There's Milly. You two girls are inseparable. You will make some sort of a sisterhood presently. The worst feature in this woman's idea is the aggregate home, not the individual home. A woman isn't to waste her sweetness on one man and his fireside, but some great assemblage of people where her power can be felt and known and talked about. Think of a mite like Tessy Murray standing on a platform and making a speech!"

Dell had been waxing indignant; now she laughed. The picture was so comical. Dell had never been to any important woman's meeting, but she could imagine—did the women all talk together, like a lot of girls, and how would Tessy make herself heard? And Leonard's voice had such a humorously aggrieved sound.

"I've brought your letters," said Millicent, entering. "There is one on private matters. Are there any plans for to-day? To-night we go to the Chandler Masons', you know."

"And wish the New Year in! Why, I *had* almost forgotten it. I am so glad you mean to go. Uncle Dick and Aunt Julia are coming back to-day."

"And I must go to-morrow. I did mean to stay over Sunday." He looked at Dell again, and the warm color flew to her face. What had brought back this old trick of blushing at everything? "You girls have good times, after all. You needn't hanker for business."

Then he ran lightly upstairs to Aunt Aurelia's room, to say good-by. She was alone, and glanced up with a smile of welcome.

"Do not let Cousin Carrick worry over that miserable letter!" he exclaimed. "Her brother ought to be considering her instead. And father doesn't think she should be allowed to return to that old ramshackle place. He will offer her a home gladly, and why shouldn't you?"

"You forget that my supremacy at Sherburne House is about expiring."

She glanced at him with a kind of inquiry that softened her face almost to a smile. Had she ever dreamed of taking it so comfortably?

"As if that mattered! As if Dell would not agree only too readily. You have just to try her generous inclinations."

He looked so assured and happy that she did smile then. Was he answering for her in some especial certainty? Miss Sherburne's heart bounded with a secret joy. If the old dream should come true!

"Good-by," he said, kissing her. "I may not be over again, but I shall run down now and then. Wish Cousin Carrick adieu for me."

He drove back with Millicent, as there were some matters he wished to attend to for his father. He had meant to explain to his cousin a surprising conclusion he had reached, but now there would be no opportunity. He could not make one to-night. Would a month or two matter?

They subsided presently to ordinary life. Dell was sorry to have Major Stanwood go. They *did* ask too much of Aunt Julia. Miss Sherburne's health was fairly good, though she would never be strong again. Miss Carrick was really the more active. Dell smiled a little to herself, almost as if she could see her own reproduction in them as the years went on. Was it what one would choose?

The other was at her hand, she thought. There were moments when it tempted her; not now, but in some distant time. How many of the finer, stronger qualities had come to the top in Leonard? "Like Uncle Beaumanoir," who had made a fond husband, a wise and tender father. And soon he would yield to the larger appreciation of Millicent, for it was becoming evident that she could charm a circle of intelligent readers. She did not aspire to enchain the whole world; she was glad to give and let people take joyfully, or pass her by to a higher and finer work. If she gave of her best it was all she could do.

Dell wondered how she could be so sweet and loving under her father's restrictions. They were of the old time, the dread that a woman would become less tender and domestic in any intense struggle for fame. And it was different even with Milly. She had been

married and gone out from the home; she had an income—not large, to be sure, but was not dependent upon him.

“I cannot understand yet why being a genius, or a lecturer, or on a committee that takes most of one’s time, should be so much more reprehensible than all this rush of fashion!” Dell said, with emphasis, as she had many a time before. It was her standing argument. And she always pointed it with: “Look at Ethel and Aunt Lepage!”

“But papa doesn’t approve of that, either. It is anything, all things that take a woman from home. He only looks at the injurious side. But homes are not what they used to be. There isn’t the demand for the same kind of work. Machinery has revolutionized us all. The old-fashioned picture was a woman sitting at her needlework, or going about with her keys at her belt, reading Miss Austen and Mrs. Sherwood, and even Hannah More. I dare say there were people in those days who looked with terror on some of those literary women.”

“And yet I have come to be a good deal interested in the talks of Aunt Aurelia and Cousin Carrick about these same people,” laughed Dell. “I find them a little prosy. They must have had loads of leisure.”

“That is the charm to me. I am afraid we shall get to hurrying life too much, and be all nerves and sensations. It is good to stop and think God has some purposes and is able to bring them to pass. He may even smile in his infinite way over our little flurries and efforts, that never disarrange his plans.”

“I wish I could think life was planned out, and all you had to do was go straight on. I hate the puzzling, the balancing, the fear of making mistakes.”

Millicent studied the young, impatient face. Was a mistake imminent in her life? Would she always be a little restless, with this changefulness of girlhood, and circumstances never quite outgrown? the half-digested thoughts flashing and lighting up her face. "She does need a wider sphere," Millicent admitted. Would not a home in a great city give her this? After a few years of it she would be content to settle down.

"I wish I were like you!" Dell said, in her swift, impassioned manner. "Not for the genius; I would leave you that. But for the peace and patience."

"There may be more credit in struggling against impatience. My first lesson was relinquishing and waiting, not for any particular thing, but just what God thought best to send."

"And you really have spoiled Uncle Beaumanoir. He doesn't seem to think all this praise and recognition might be sweet to you. And the years go on so fast!"

"Do they, to you?"

"Days seem slow—no, not always. I don't do half the things I plan. And soon—in four months I shall be twenty-one. I am not ready for it. I wish I could put it off. But everything is to remain just as it is. I am not desirous of any power or any privileges that I do not have now. In fact, every month Aunt Aurelia develops some touch of sweetness, just like a new blossoming. And do you know, I think Cousin Carrick tried her a little at first, but now they get along beautifully. Aunt Julia has been the oil," laughingly. "I am not sure, though, but that we ought to turn her out."

"Turn her out?" repeated Millicent, in amaze.

Then Dell laughed merrily at the perturbed face.

"Oh, you mean——" lighting up with amusement.

"Yes, the right to her own life. But she won't, until matters change some way, unless Uncle Dick should be sent to some distant post. She thinks, or makes us believe that she does, that this is the best thing for the little boys. They do have a happy life, and I love them dearly myself."

"It doesn't need to be settled to-day. Sufficient for the day are both the good and the evil. It wouldn't be honest to reach over and take to-morrow's good."

"I wonder if it is not what I am trying to do! There, now I am going to talk to Miss Neale, and you shall go to your desk and write a poem or a chapter of a story."

Dell kissed her and ran downstairs. There was no one to stop and chatter with. And she had some new magazines for the young woman teaching Miss Neale's school. That had enlarged its borders and was of much service.

Millicent went to her desk and finished a letter, and then leaning her cheek on her hand, thought about her cousin. Was the destiny they all wished for her, that seemed now on the verge of being accomplished, the best thing that could happen to her? Was there some secret rebellion that she was trying to conquer?

She went over to Sherburne House in the afternoon with a note that had just come. The second installment of her story had elicited some fine, discriminating praise, and the note was from Mr. and Mrs. Southgate, asking her to come up and spend a fortnight.

"Oh, it is splendid!" cried Dell. "And what did

Uncle Beaumanoir say? for I know you went at once and read it to him."

Millicent's eyes softened with a lustrous light.

He said, "I suppose I will have to give my little girl up to the world. It is almost like marrying you again," and she flushed with a sort of girlish shyness. "A queer idea, wasn't it? but I can understand the sort of jealous love."

If she had a father to love her like that, she would never want to marry, Lyndell thought.

"Of course you will go?"

"Last evening I had a letter from Bertram. He advised me to, by all means. He has been so interested in my success; indeed, I think he has contributed to it," and she smiled deliciously, a happy smile that thrilled Dell. "He knows so many people; he keeps always in the midst of things. I am afraid, sometimes, he will wear himself out too soon."

Dell gave a sigh. Did *he* realize this lovely thoughtfulness? Just as Millicent cared for her father, for all those around her.

"And he said something else, Dell," the wavering light giving her face persuasive tints that joined the pleading of the words. "He wants you to come. I want you, too. Can't you go up to the Murrays? Your visit was brought to such a sudden close last year. Or, if you liked better, there are nice, quiet hotels——"

"Morna wrote me a month ago," interposed Dell hurriedly, glad somehow that she had been thought of. "Milly, Mrs. Murray is the sweet, old-fashioned wife that seems to be idealized"—among you all, she was going to say, but checked what might seem a vexing reflection. "She cares how she may please her

husband—did St. Paul object or not? I really forget. Mr. Murray and the boys and the babies—but oh, dear! there are no babies now, though I don't know that Densie will ever be allowed to grow out of the nursery. She never writes a letter; Morna has to do all this now. And she begged me to come if I was not going out to Tessy."

"Oh, then you will go?" delightedly.

"I decided not to. There were things I wanted to do and think of, and a little discipline is good sometimes. You know I am too restless. My repose of manner is largely for company times, but I *am* trying to cultivate it, and some deeper graces. They did not really need me, for all Tessy has gone."

"But you can reconsider! And a week or two—— Then Mr. Southgate is delightful. You don't need to have written a book in order to meet such people."

"Oh, my dear! tempt me not." She was not quite strong enough to face the joy of these two people, who were so ready to take her into the best of their lives.

"I should so like to have you."

A certain resolute steadiness came to Dell's face, the Sherburne decision. Millicent never teased. She gave Dell the note to read. It was most kindly and assuring, with the advice of a wide experience.

"Why, they would want you all the time," she said, with an attempt at mirthfulness. "You will be meeting grand people and going to teas and receptions, and I would be the—the fifth wheel," raising her bright, soft eyes with her strength of will. "No, you must have no one to feel anxious about; no one to detract from your splendor! Oh, Milly! I *am* glad. I didn't want your light forever hidden under a bushel."

"We wanted to be certain it was a light. If it had only been a 'farthing rush,' I might have been grateful for the protection."

Milly begged Aunt Julia to try to persuade her.

In the midst of it all Leonard came down with urgent messages and positive instructions to bring them both up to Washington. Ethel felt herself rather aggrieved that neither of the girls had accepted any of her invitations. He was quite surprised at Millicent's new honors, and really very eager for her success.

Dell wondered a little at this.

Aunt Aurelia quite insisted. "There is no such time of enjoyment as youth, and two old women are quite enough in one house. You have been nowhere this whole winter. You cousins ought to keep up the old cordiality."

The tide was too strong to stem.

"You see Ethel will be almost indignant *not* to stand social sponsor for Milly's new glories. You will have to come and help me bear it. And then Milly can meet you later on," declared Leonard.

"Oh, yes!" returned Milly eagerly. "I am only invited for a week or ten days, but I thought I should like a little visit in the Murrays' charming home nest. I will explain to Ethel, so that she may not feel hurt, and promise to come. That settles it, Dell."

It was better arranged that way. Dell resigned herself. Was she resigning herself to something else as well? In the confusion she could not discern clearly.

"Len," she said laughingly—he had been especially solicitous and tender to Millicent—"I thought you would abhor a literary woman!"

"Not a woman like Millicent! No, I shouldn't abhor, but I shouldn't ever marry one. Maybe

you have found by this time that I do not love to share adoration. My wife must live for me, not the world."

Was he warning her? He gave a soft laugh, quite as if he was satisfied.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LOVER'S CONFESSION.

LYNDELL SHERBURNE never could recall exactly, in the after years, how much she had determined at this period of her life, whether she had thought it possible to love her cousin in any wifely fashion, or best to keep her own soul pure and strong for whatever might come in the future; whether she had made her ideal so high that she would be unable to attract it, or if it was the figment of a girl's romantic fancy, to be toned to proper reality as time went on.

She saw a good deal of her cousin now among men of the world. He carried weight and had a dignified air; he was handsome, and women were making much of him on every side. That seductive sense of power that men and women yield to unconsciously, the fine inflections of voice that give ordinary words a new and deeper meaning, the elegant polish and suave manner, startled and entertained her. At first it seemed unlike him, insincere; as if it was the real Leonard only that came down to Beaumanoir and laid aside the society adjuncts, was eager, boyish, petulant, imperious, and affectionate by turns. Did people show their real selves in society? Or was it that souls were many-sided, with facets that caught different rays and gave back corresponding colors?

But neither could she make the Ethel she had known abroad out of Mrs. Longworth, who was really

a power in society, of a different caliber from her mother. She upheld the Longworth dignity royally. She seemed to know all about art and music and new books that were making a stir, theories that were engrossing people, nations that were progressing or retrograding, men and women who had done notable things. She had wonderful social tact. To-day it was one little coterie at luncheon, adjusted with nicest harmony, in the evening grave men of culture or science, to-morrow night a dinner and a dance to the favorite young *débutantes*; the next day a debate in the House, and so on.

Leonard smiled over Dell's perplexity.

"It is living out of doors the whole time," he said. He came in nearly every evening. He was at hand to do anything for Ethel, to dance with pretty girls, to join a theater party, to drive with her, to drop in to afternoon teas and chat. She was proud of him, and yet it almost seemed as if she patronized him as well. He took it good-humoredly, and said to Dell that everybody had to be on their best behavior.

He made the peace by telling her Milly's successes before she could see the account of her pretty reception in New York. She was surprised and gratified that she should have the first chance with her here.

"I don't see why she didn't keep her title, the foolish girl! Society demands so much nowadays. And her romantic marriage and widowhood will do a good deal for her."

Dell seemed quite lost for the first week, bewildered by the kaleidoscopic life. But she met some old friends and made new ones. It appeared indeed as if one made them easily; but you only went so far. A few might last another season.

Aunt Lepage had taken up the rôle of an invalid, and Dell thought it sat quite gracefully upon her. She took her airing on sunny days, she sat languidly on the sofa at afternoon teas, with a soft white wrap slipping partly off her shoulders. She had a select circle of her own friends, women who talked nervous prostration and doctors, sometimes speculated in a mild, chilly way upon faith cures and Christian science. Women's clubs and the suffrage threw them into paroxysms of terrified disgust.

Leonard seemed more real to her than anyone else, perhaps because she knew the other side of him so well.

"It is all like a play," she said, when he dropped in one afternoon. Ethel had gone to a grand reception, very select indeed. No one had permission even to invite a friend.

"But you really wouldn't care," she said to Dell. "If you would like a drive, I will send Mrs. Travis in to chaperon you."

"I would rather stay at home," she pleaded. So Leonard found her in the small reception room used for family purposes, curled up in a big chair with a novel.

"It is a kind of stage performance, when you take it in this fashion," he replied. "Ethel is quick to catch up the fads. She will be a success because she will take them all when they are new, and drop them before they have a chance to get worn threadbare, or suggest the slightest flavor of staleness."

"There isn't any real living in it. I do not wonder Alice wanted something different. But the queer thing is that Mr. Longworth seems satisfied; really pleased, indeed."

Leonard shrugged his shoulders. "I dare say he has drained most of the cups of delight and found dregs at the bottom of all. Now he is a prosperous man, with a good name and a fair record, a power not behind thrones, exactly, but a good many large ventures. Men wait for his nod. Politicians know the worth of his name, seldom allowed to be used and so kept in good repute. He has a young, handsome, well-bred wife; for though I do not consider Ethel as pretty as Alice and not half as sweet, she is much more effective in society. And she holds herself regally; there will never be any scandal about her."

"Scandal!" There was a little horrified look in Dell's eyes.

"Yes. A good many women are careless, imprudent, longing to play with fire and believing they can manage it so that they will not even be singed; but it is a hard thing. And Ethel is quite heartless, as a society woman needs to be."

"You are cynical." Dell was rather mystified.

"But I have some dreams left. I mean," coloring a little, "that I have begun to dream. I dare say you think me narrow and selfish. Perhaps I am. But I want one draught of—'what some have found so sweet.'"

He paused and looked at his watch. Then he glanced intently at his cousin, hardly heeding that her face fluttered from pink to scarlet.

"Dell, I want to tell you a story. For three months almost, I have been a coward, delaying——"

"Oh, do not, do not!" She sprang up in dismay. She poised a moment, the embodiment of flight. No, she could not listen; she knew in that instant, when the supreme test came.

"Dell, my dear cousin, it is not as you think, if you *do* think I mean to importune on a subject that would have no real heart in it for either of us." He caught her arm and drew her back to the chair, while he sank in the corner of the sofa from which he had but half raised his graceful length.

"And yet," he added, in a serious tone, "I am to purchase a certain sort of immunity by asking you to marry me. Dell, I know now you do not love me; perhaps you never could in a satisfying manner. You do not know what love is; and you will need a better man than I to rouse your admiration. Is that humble enough?"

"I don't understand you. I know they have begun to believe again. Aunt Aurelia——"

She covered her face with her hands.

"We had better have it all out now. Don't you remember Christmas night I asked that we might be friends? Such friends as we have never been before, the sort of friend one can make confession to, and receive absolution from. I meant to tell you all through that visit, but every opportunity was nipped by an untoward fate. I have never appreciated you so much, and now I would not wound you by offering you any but the highest love. That I cannot do. That belongs to another!"

Had she been so mistaken! Perhaps there is always a sense of mortified vanity when a woman finds she has been supplanted. She had been trying so hard to accept what looked like love, earnestness, and she was bewildered to find it mistranslated. She glanced helplessly at him.

"If you could guess! Someone who went into exile cheerfully; someone who would not wrest a

crumb from her best friend; who would pluck out her right eye rather than indulge in a mean or dishonorable thought."

She saw it written in his face, or it came to her in some subtle trick of consciousness.

"Tessy!" she cried, and then she was frightened.

He began to pace the room, but the soft carpet gave back no step.

"Tessy Murray! I asked her to marry me last December, and she had a dozen conscientious scruples about you. I asked her father, and he flatly refused me. That was why Tessy went away so suddenly."

"Refused you! I don't understand——"

"I hardly did myself at the time. It was the Murray pride against the Beaumanoir pride. No, let me do him justice. It was a sense of honor that I shall always admire. The two families had come to be friendly. Tessy had been received as a trusted friend and guest at Sherburne House, and he would not allow anything to be done to mar the confidence that it had taken years to establish. He advised me to relinquish her, and suggested there might be a marriage much more satisfactory to all parties."

The same high integrity that had characterized Mr. Murray's dealings with her when his affection had been stabbed and rent by sharp unkindness! And that another should be cruelly wounded—sweet, loving little Tessy! Dell reached out suddenly, as if to shield her with protecting arms.

"I am so sorry!" she cried. "Oh, how could you! how could you!"

"Dell, some day you may learn it all for yourself. Until then it will be a mystery no one can explain. I think I fell in love with her that night I went to the

theater for you, though I did not realize it until in the summer. I used to go up to their seaside cottage on Long Island, and I fell in love again with the mother, with the whole lovely crew of them! They were so enchanting in their simplicity. It was like a pastoral, a little bit of real living among the shams and pretenses and strifes and envyings. I felt for a while that I was not fit for any such pure, sweet life. It was the beginning of a reformation, yet I struggled against it mightily. Morally I was not so far out of the way. I had been a good deal spoiled by indulgence, and the love lavished upon me had made me selfish instead of generous. Well, I am a sorry kind of hero. I've done a good deal of sinning against you. I've had courage enough to confess it, but there never seemed an opportunity. Providence must have sent us this afternoon——” He sat down beside her again, and after a pause continued: “You see, I have been so used to considering only my own pleasure, and how things affected me. Grandfather and Aunt Aurelia spoiled me. I was nearly always at Sherburne House, and I grew up with the feeling that it ought to be mine. I came to love you very dearly when the matter reached a reasonable sort of adjustment. But you outgrew my ideal sweetheart, who was to be *petite* and clinging and shyly tender, the sort of wife you could hold and caress and tease a little, and who would always worship you!”

“And I am not *petite*, nor very worshipful,” she interrupted, smiling in spite of a certain sadness. “I am too strong, too——”

“Too clear-eyed, perhaps,” and he gave a soft half laugh. “Dell, you should have been Constantine Murray's child. Mrs. Murray has given her individ-

uality to Tessy. She isn't weak, either. When you think of a mother who has trained such a flock—well, she is fit to be set beside my mother, which is saying a good deal. And the man you marry ought to have no petty meanness in his soul, for your eyes would wither him!"

In a vague fashion she saw it. There would have been "places" between her and Leonard that would have caused heartaches.

"Perhaps if you had been born at Sherburne House we should only have been cousins—or if you had been a Lepage daughter. But I *did* covet Sherburne House. And when I learned to love you so well, one of my dreams was of presently spending our lives together there. Still—understand, I couldn't have married for that alone, and I *was* jealous of anyone else. Dell, I wonder how you endured me through all that weary time, all that supreme selfishness! I am filled with shame when I think of it. Can you ever be generous enough to forgive it?"

"I think I did not give it that name." There were tears in Dell's eyes.

"You were all worlds too good for me. But in that wretched episode with Anita Garcia I found out, or perhaps I had not missed or realized it before—that you did *not* love me as most men wish to be loved. You never have, Lyndell."

He reached over and took both hands. He glanced into her eyes. Her face was scarlet with shame that he should look into her soul and miss what had never been there.

"I want to be loved in an eager, demonstrative fashion! I want love to flash out unexpectedly, to have caressing ways, to make me feel it, to thrill to it,

to half give and half withhold, but not from any scarcity. But then I was bound to have my own way. I could not bear to be thwarted. I said I would win you again. I knew I must take the fortress of respect first. I offered the only amends in my power——”

“And if I had said, go to her—if she had forgiven you, taken you back?” Lyndell gasped.

“She would *not* have forgiven me. Women with her blood never do. And I knew you would not send me back.”

“Then you were not honest!” she exclaimed, with sudden passion.

“I made myself believe it for the moment. But I was older and growing wiser. And I began to feel that Sherburne House had been a snare. Still, if you had loved me I do not think a ‘mine or thine’ would have troubled us. I should have loved the old home so. And oh, Dell! believe that I should have tried my utmost to make you happy. My father has been an ideal husband, and I should have endeavored to emulate him. You see, then, I had really loved no one else. I had not had any violent boyish fancies except that little streak of ill-fated tenderness. Will you believe this?”

She knew in her heart it was so, and nodded slowly, acquiescently.

“And to-day, always, I shall have a tender love for you, something more than brotherly. I shall feel indeed as if I had married your little sister.”

“But, Tessy——” Dell was sore confused.

“I shall make it come right. I will wait years, until I have convinced everyone this is my only, unalterable love. I wanted to tell you first, since it

explained some things that have led to a misunderstanding with the others. Is it all clean and clear between us? Will you let me win a brother's place and esteem henceforth? Mr. Murray will not consent unless Tessy can be cordially welcomed in her new relation. I do not think anyone will stand out long against my happiness. In that respect he is right enough. Tessy is educated, accomplished, refined, and has had advantages of travel. Then she has a natural sense of the proprieties; that charming, easy way, as if she had known everything from the beginning. She is like a dainty nymph cut in fine cameo. She has spirit and dignity, too, and a strength you would hardly look for—the strength to be rigidly up-right at any cost."

It was delightful to hear her praised. It was lovely to know that a feeling of the highest honor had made her reticent and seemingly cold, not any forgetfulness of friendship's sacred claim.

But the complications it was bringing about! Dell looked at him in a steady, inquiring, if half alarmed manner.

"It was in early December when I asked her. One evening there were several guests, and among them a very attractive young man, quite desperately in love with her. I felt then I must put my fate to the touch. I had meant to take the midnight train to Washington, but I stayed over. I was not sure Tessy anything more than admired me as your cousin, and yet I had seen a few shy indications that had set all my pulses athrill. Well, I was not long in finding out the sweet knowledge."

A soft light illumined every feature. Dell thought he had never looked so handsome. And the half sigh

of remembrance that escaped his lips stirred her strangely.

“And then began the trouble—not the first moment, for that was given over to utter deliciousness. She had a thousand sweet scruples concerning you, and she insisted, before any promise was given, that I should ask you in all honesty to marry me. As if a man *could* in all honesty! And then I felt self-convinced in the matter of Anita.”

“And you told her that?”

“No, I didn't. Oh, I am not half through confessing, but yours comes first. I think I did finally convince her, but I promised this, that if I saw any real sign of yielding on your part, I would consider it. I suppose she thought, sweet saint! that with opportunity you *must* needs love me, and she would defraud you of no right. Then I went to her father, and that evening we had a family conclave. These Arnolds were going to San Francisco in about a week, and had asked Tessy to go with them. You can guess the arguments Mr. Murray used. The thought that his family had taken any undue advantage to bring about such an engagement pained him to the quick. And the feeling that Tessy might not be made cordially welcome was a source of poignant disquiet. I promised that for three months I would hold no communication with her, but I would not stipulate to use my best efforts to forget her.”

He smiled with a fascinating tenderness, as if he saw her before his eyes. What strange tumult of feeling did it awaken in Lyndell? She had prayed sometimes in that intense, wordless fashion, of the thought unexpressed, that Leonard might be attracted to someone and leave her conscience clear. If it were

some brilliant girl here in Washington she could be glad. But Tessy!

He watched the changes going over her face.

"Are you angry?" he cried. "I know I must seem a weak, despicable fellow in your sight. Yet if you *had* really loved me, I should not have come to this experience, you see. I should have been loyal to you in every respect. I suppose there are hundreds of people who marry on that kind of love and settle to very comfortable lives. But I am afraid"—he drew her nearer to him and pressed his lips to her forehead—"I am afraid in some respects I should want to make you over, and you would not take kindly to the process."

"No, I should not." The answer seemed wrested from her. There was a subtle, insurmountable difference.

"You are noble and grand; at least, you will be when you get all your soul-growth. You would want a man to be in the large, philanthropical movements, to go outside, to work for the world, for the high theories of humanity. I have naturally an ease-loving nature. It is the little circle right around me—home, wife, children," and his voice fell to a tender, touching inflection.

She saw it all, like a picture. Tessy filling just such a place as Mamma Murray, rich in love and tenderness and all sweet influences. Only, it should be at Sherburne House.

He rose then, and taking Dell's hands, drew her up as well, making her face him.

"Now that I have really given up Sherburne House"—did the thought startle her, so different and yet so akin to hers?—"I feel a fresh accession of

manliness. I wonder if I can make you understand? I shall always love it. I shall want to make pilgrimages to it. And I think I could not be thoroughly happy with a woman whose soul was not fine enough to appreciate the ties there have been between *us*, the tender remembrances that must always remain."

She was touched then to her inmost being. "Oh," she cried, "I want you to know that I tried; that there were times when I truly believed I loved you. It was not all because I wanted to give you back Sherburne House. And they all loved me so!"

"But your fancied duty was a great factor. It was a hundred times nobler than my selfish desire. I can believe now that God withheld us from that greater mistake; but if it had happened I believe he would have given us grace to do our best. And now, dear, I think I can truly say I am glad it is yours. In the new home that I shall make I want you to be a loved friend and sister, like Millicent. And if you do not write a book," laughing a little, "I think you will do a good work somewhere in the world that can take its place beside hers. And now, knowing me better than ever, shall we join hands in a lasting friendship?"

She gave him hers. He pressed it reverently to his lips. It was a new and sacred compact.

The man was lighting up the hall, and the long ray, streaming in, served to show the twilight of the room that had stolen on them unaware.

"I have talked unconscionably!" he exclaimed. "There were such long arrears to straighten up. And now I must go, or Ethel will think me an unmitigated heathen. What is it to-night?"

"The dance at the Cranfords' in honor of the young lieutenant. Oh, I don't want to go! I just

want to stay at home and think. And Ethel told me to go to bed for an hour, so as to be nice and fresh. She is very kind to me, though I thought once she would never forgive the part I seemed to have in Alice's marriage."

"There is a happy wife! And now run to bed, or the sofa, and be fresh for to-night; for I shall be there, filling up the dance pauses with talk. Adieu!"

She vanished up the broad stairway just in time, for a few moments later she heard the trained voice of Mrs. Longworth and her light step.

Lyndell threw herself on the couch in a tumult of thought. She could not tell in the first few moments whether to be glad or to cry. There was a great, strange pang in her soul that she could not understand. It came from the growing out of some plan that had seemed a duty, that she had struggled against, and finally accepted; that she had indignantly relinquished, and softened to again.

Leonard was right. They would never have reached the highest plane of happiness. There would have been friction, efforts, discouragements. The perfect and entire relationship of marriage would have been marred. She had no personal disappointment; it was for the others. Why should she see it so plainly, so keenly now; look at it, indeed, with such a large, suffering pity?

Why was it that she did not rejoice in her own unquestioned freedom? Why was there a cold, bleak feeling, as if she were left out in some kind of a storm? Life was not hopeless, or useless, or even devoid of pleasure. But she did not want to begin with the pleasure to-night.

Mrs. Longworth resigned herself to the hands of

her skillful maid, and to her couch for half an hour. There was only a quiet dinner, with two large land speculators from the Western Coast, who rejoiced at the opportunity of such a talk with Mr. Longworth. Ethel was gracious and dignified. Mrs. Lepage did not come down.

Then there was an elaboration at the hands of the maid, and Lyndell emerged a very striking young woman in her white silk gown and delicate laces—a candidate for the evening's honors as well as Lieutenant Cranford. Leonard met them. Was this tall, stylish cousin the reason he was so impervious to insidious attentions and preferences? Miss Sherburne had a kind of elegant, distant grandeur that Mrs. Longworth approved. Indeed, she had complimented her on getting rid of her demonstrativeness.

To-night she moved like one in a dream. Even Leonard, in his superb health and brilliance, seemed unreal to her. So admirably calculated for society, she could not understand the sort of love he had confessed.

"You look as if you did not believe in me, Dell!" he exclaimed softly, in one of the pauses.

"I feel somehow as if I did not believe in anybody. I can't make it true. What is to come next?"

He gave an almost imperceptible shrug.

"A conference with Mr. Murray, I think. I shall go up after Millicent. She, lovely soul, has gone to the Murrays' in the most unsuspecting frame of mind, and waxes eloquent over Morna. So many honors have been showered upon her, the flavor will be taken out of Ethel's."

They turned and moved away with other partners.

But presently they found each other, and he took her for an ice.

"It is a brilliant scene," he said, glancing out of the wide doorway. "Like a young girl, I remember my first winter, when it seemed as if I could never get my fill of pleasure. How do they go on forever?"

"But there are new people. And someone is always taking the first of it. And lovers, real lovers, and others playing at it. It *is* interesting."

"But to do the same thing over and over for years!"

"Evidently your heart is not in it," smilingly.

"No, it is out there," making a little indication with his head. "What do you suppose they are doing—Alice and Tessy? Has she written much to you? Is she very unhappy, think?"

A hundred times he had spoken to her in that pleading, entreating, persuasive tone, but it seemed as if she heard it then for the first time.

"No, I think not unhappy."

"Will you write to her? Tell her——"

"Oh, may I?" raising her eyes eagerly.

"I shall be glad to have you. This has been the longest three months of my life. And what it has been to her! I knew what I meant to do, but with her there must have been uncertainty. Oh, Dell! how lovely you women are to trust so!"

She remembered someone else who had trusted, in the simple ignorance of her heart. Yet Anita was very happy in her new life.

Lyndell was glad to have her signal from Ethel. They could afford to retire early. Miss Sherburne was not husband-hunting.

Leonard put them into the carriage. "I *do* wonder

if they are engaged?" thought Ethel. "Len is so indifferent to everybody. But he could marry a million or two, if he chose, with that face and bearing."

Dell stole an hour for her letter the next day. But she sat with her pen in her hand and dreamed. What could she say while everything was unfinished?

CHAPTER XVII.

COMPLICATIONS.

LEONARD declared he could not wait for Milly to finish her visit, as every day there came some new thing. But Dell knew it was his own impatient longing.

She had tried to plan for the ending.

"Nothing does come out as you wish, or in the way you plan," she said, discouraged.

If Leonard only had chosen someone else, she thought, she could exult in the knowledge of freedom. But it was like being unwound with one end of a chain and wound up with the other; the feeling that she would be asking a welcome for her friend, instead of joyfully insisting upon a welcome for Leonard's wife.

His two days lengthened to four. There was no letter, only a telegram saying when they might be expected.

The wife of the English Minister was giving a tea. Dell did not care, so she went to the station to meet Milly.

How lovely and inspiring she looked! Praise and attentions had roused the quiet of her nature.

"It has been delightful!" she said to Dell, as she clasped her hand. "I did not know that I was capable of taking in such intense satisfaction. I *did* wish you were there to temper the giddiness and enjoy the

lovely receptions—artists and authors and people of note just giving you their everyday life; not attiring it in fine raiment because you were you.”

“And Ethel means to have it all over.”

“Ethel is one of the lady patronesses of the world. What she will be in ten years more—well, some of the stars above, made possible by new discoveries, may open their hospitable palaces to us in that time. She will be among the earliest callers, before the thing gets common.” Leonard uttered this with good-natured irony.

“I should like to go straight home, but that never would do,” subjoined Millicent. “I am really tired.”

“You can have this evening to rest in. There is a ladies’ luncheon and an elegant dinner for the elect, to-morrow. And we are besieged with invitations.”

“What a fuss! As if no one ever wrote a story before—very good ones, too,” blushing and smiling.

“It isn’t altogether that!” returned Dell. “People knew you before. And Violet was so admired last winter, and there was her marriage to Paul Amory.”

“Poor father, with two famous women! He will have to get his comfort out of Fanny.”

They all laughed at that. Fanny was the least charming and the least domestic of the three girls.

Millicent was handed out first. Dell gave Leonard a look of intense, impatient inquiry.

“It will all come right,” he whispered. “I get my way sooner or later.”

Dell took Milly up to her room, which connected with the one she had. The maid came in and unpacked her trunk and brought her up some tea.

“We shall have a good hour,” said Dell.

They sat in the pretty wicker chairs beside the dainty table and sipped their tea.

"Oh, Milly! were you very, very much surprised?" Dell asked at length, her voice all in a tremble, her color wavering with a touch of fear.

"About Leonard? Oh, Dell! I don't know what to say. It was your place, with all of us. You were right in the other instance; but lately, through the winter, he seemed so changed, so sweet and thoughtful, and we all took heart again, believing it your influence——"

"I have never influenced him to any appreciable extent," Dell said, with a slight bitterness.

"Yes, I think you have, in many things. You have influenced us all, dear, and we are glad to have you. If you could have been put in *that* place! And Leonard insists that you never truly loved him, that it was an attempt all the time and not a spontaneous outgiving. My darling, if I *could* believe that! You gave him up, I know, and papa *was* satisfied then. But since——"

Her lovely eyes overflowed with tears, and her lips quivered with emotion.

"Oh, Milly! it *is* true. Can one make that kind of love come at will? I wanted to, because you were all so kind and fond to me, and I did take delight in the thought of Leonard being some day at Sherburne House. Anita Garcia's love was stronger and better than mine, and somehow it opened my eyes. But she has outlived it, and it really never was a love on his side. It was unfortunate, but I do not think he was deeply to blame. Though I *was* angry then at his decision, which was the best thing for everybody."

"Oh, Dell!" Milly gave a long, half-incredulous sigh.

"I don't know how high, how far-fetched and impossible a girl's ideal of love is, but that never reached mine. And it seems as if love ought to come without so much effort."

"If he had broken your heart, or wounded it beyond redemption, I should have had hard work to forgive him. Leonard has many fine qualities, but he is nowhere near perfection. I always thought, as a wife, you would have great influence over him."

"And Tessy will. Millicent, I have been looking myself over these few days in a kind of surprised way. There isn't much perfection about me, either. I feel as if I wanted a teacher, a trainer. Some of the things I care most about are of no consequence to Leonard. Honestly, I do not think we are the two people to work out a life plan together."

Millicent looked unconvinced.

"There's something about Tessy—I don't think I can quite describe it. I do not understand spiritual chemistry or component parts of heart and mind. Tessy has no trouble about growth and symmetry; she just unfolds, like a rose in blooming, and gives out her sweetness to everyone. I do not mean that she is devoid of discrimination. But she seems always to know just what to do, as if there were some unseen harmony within her, and she seldom makes a discord. She is beautiful to watch. It always rests you."

"Bertram said something similar about her. I half accused him of being in love with her."

Millicent blushed as she said this, and then Dell colored vividly.

"You talked it over with him!"

"Len did, a little. He is desperately in earnest. Oh, my dear, if he had been that way about Miss Garcia! I tremble to even imagine the consequences. And Bertram thinks it a good thing for Len to be so fearlessly in earnest—though he has been quite patient for such a headstrong, imperious fellow; waiting the three months."

Millicent made a long pause and sat toying with her teaspoon.

"Is anything decided upon?" Dell ventured rather timidly.

"Leonard had permission to write to her. Otherwise I believe he would have gone out to California, perhaps married her at once. Of course—and this we must all be thankful about—there is nothing objectionable in her family. It even has the flavor of antiquity. And though we are no great sticklers for wealth—to-day I suppose Mr. Murray is really richer than papa. They have no vulgarities. They live in their lovely surroundings as if they had been born in them. Mrs. Murray used to be a little afraid of grandeur, I think," and Millicent smiled, "but she has grown used to it. What Con and the children like is the needful thing, and she accustoms herself to it at once. Papa will take it quite comfortably. It isn't as if it put you out of our lives."

She came around and took Dell in her arms.

Yes, if it could have been so; if it had been ordained from the beginning! Dell could see the happiness on both sides of her; could she be content to remain in the middle and have them both giving out bits of their joy for her own share? She set her lips steadily.

"Dear me!" began Milly, with a tremulous laugh to break the tense feeling, "engagements bring about a great stir and excitement. I thought boys were no special anxiety. Next we will be worrying about Ned. And I wonder if I shall ever be a careful mother, 'preaching down my daughter's heart'?"

Ethel came home from her reception, resplendent in gray velvet and black lace, and with a word of enthusiastic greeting swept into the room.

"Upon my word, Milly, you have stolen a fine march upon us all! I must congratulate you. The romances of life seem to fall to your share, while the rest of us have to keep to common, everyday prose. Some of the 'stars' are coming to bid you welcome to-morrow, so be prepared to do your best, and give credit to your native State. I am going out with Mr. Longworth to dine, and then to a musicale—charity," and she laughed daintily. "Dell, see that Milly is made comfortable, and go to bed early, both of you. We will have our chat over the breakfast table."

Millicent smiled as she rustled through the hall and summoned her maid.

"Leonard said Ethel lived in her surroundings. She seems to thrive upon it."

"I can't see how she does so much," Dell almost groaned, so intense was the tone. "And the good of it, after it is done! But you must go and see Aunt Lepage. She is a bundle of sensitive nerves, and very exigent."

The tone amused Millicent.

"Then I will see if we can't have a little dinner in the breakfast room with no state or fuss. After that, comfort," declared Lyndell.

The call was made and Aunt Lepage said a good

many gracious and ungracious things, but Millicent took them all cheerfully.

They were not to spend the evening alone, however. Leonard came in and asked that Miss Sherburne might be summoned.

"I am going to bore you only a few minutes," he began, "and poor Milly is tired to death of the talk. What a breeze it is going to make! Con, junior, has sailed from Japan, will touch at Hawaii, and reach San Francisco sometime, and bring Tessy home with him. Meanwhile, letters and an infinitude of patience, which I never was famous for. And when you girls go home I shall accompany you and explain the matter to father and Aunt Aurelia. She will be the most disappointed. Oh, Dell! I hope this is not going to make it any harder for you! But if you wouldn't have me——"

There was a gay little sound, not quite a laugh.

She could not altogether dismiss a haunting sense of shame. Whether she was glad she had tried and not succeeded, or with the sense of unconscious defeat, almost angry that she had tried at all, she could not decide. Leonard was happy and hopeful. This was the beginning of quite a new life. He shouldn't look for any outside help, but just go on, and when the time came, he and Tessy would take up the future simply, not in any swell fashion, and live just for each other.

How his eyes softened and deepened, and his voice dropped from key to key, taking on tones of richness and tender feeling! Had he ever cared for her like that? Oh, sad thought—what if she were incapable of inspiring such love! And how handsome he looked in his evening attire, smiling and declaring it was a

bore to go out, and that he was longing for a bird's nest of his own and that sweet, dainty, delicious Tessy!

Millicent could not forbear smiling when she came back. But both were rather too sore to talk about the lovers, and there had been so many delightful and entertaining episodes in her visit. There was a certain dignified assurance that sat gracefully upon her. She had been learning her own powers. Her grace and beauty had attracted, it was true; her refinement and sweetness were great charms; but this newly found gift was no mere ephemeral sparkle. She had a place in the world of knowledge and culture to fill, and she accepted it with a grateful exultation.

Mrs. Longworth made the most of her in a serene manner. There were old friends to give her a welcome, who remembered her sudden engagement to the attractive young German; that she had lived in a castle, and had a title; and had been widowed under very tragic circumstances. And now she had surprised everybody by a successful venture into authorship. Her sweet Madonna face and her scarcely outworn girlhood rendered her very attractive, and Ethel was fond of new attractions. In some ways she appeared more mature than Millicent, though she disdained none of the advantages of youth!

Yet both Milly and Lyndell were glad to get back to home quiet. True, Lent began and there was a slight cessation to the whirl of gayety. People were talking of Florida and Bermuda and Southern delights.

"You look weary," Aunt Julia said, as she kissed Dell. "Have you been dreadfully dissipated?"

"I do not well know how we could have put in any

more," Dell answered brightly. "But Sherburne House looks good and restful."

Miss Carrick was eager to hear all about Millicent. Wouldn't she come over and tell them the conclusion of the story? They felt as if they couldn't wait month after month. And it was so wonderful, anyway, to be able to write; to enter into the experiences of others. She couldn't have lived through all these things and known them of herself, though her life had been checkered—a favorite word of Cousin Carrick's.

"I have wondered a little what kept Milly so thoughtful and occupied for the last year," Aunt Julia admitted. "She looks as if she ought to be a genius, although I believe they are not always as beautiful," smiling as she uttered the last.

"It is such a lovely thing to reach out into other lives that way." Dell sighed softly, wondering if she would ever reach out to the real delights in any way. She felt curiously depressed, almost as if she had unwittingly been counting on this love that had passed her by.

"I thought Leonard would be over this morning," Aunt Aurelia remarked, turning to Dell as they were going in to dinner.

Dell flushed deeply and then dropped her eyes. She, too, had been waiting with that quiver of expectancy in every nerve.

"He was not going back immediately?"

"Oh, no!"

"My dear, I hope you have not—had any differences?" She would not call them disputes.

"No, not that way." Dell's voice had a tremble in it, and she hurried on. Julius bowed them in, and there was no chance for further questioning.

It had not been fair during the morning, but now the sky grew thick and the east wind presaged a storm. It was not fit to go out, even if she had cared to. The two elder ladies retired to their after-dinner nap. Aunt Julia was busy superintending some sewing. Dell went to her room, but Philly had unpacked her trunk and put her things away in the nicest order. What should she do?

Oh, what did people do fifty or sixty years? And she had lived hardly twenty-one. Would she go on and on, taking journeys, having visitors, looking after the house a little when Aunt Julia went away, painting a plaque or a bit of scenery for a gift, writing letters, reading—well, studying, perhaps? What was the use of wide and comprehensive knowledge here?

If Millicent would stay! But some time that dearest of all calls would come to her. She, too, was certain to make another blessed center; a broad, delightful place where people would be glad to come. There would be no narrowness or selfishness in Dr. Bertram's life. They two would ask her in, and offer her the fruit of their garden.

Just in the drizzling little rain Leonard rode up to the door. She did not run down, though his coming broke the tense strain. She poked her fire and put on two or three hemlock sticks to change the gray look, fanning them to a blaze. Was that Philly coming for her?

The footstep passed along the hall. She dropped into her pretty, low rocker, and swayed slowly back and forth, watching the leaping flames and listening to the pleasant crackle. How long was it? The flames died down. She walked to the window. Duke still

stood there with the light blanket thrown over him, now and then pawing the path impatiently.

The tall figure came out, sprang into the saddle, and galloped away. Dell went back to her rocking chair, stirring the fire again. The darkness came early to-night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“YOU WILL HAVE ME.”

THERE was a soft tap at Lyndell's door. It had not been Aunt Julia's step—perhaps it was Philly, with some wood.

“Come!” she answered, in a gentle tone, but did not glance around until the step was just back of her, and the figure made a shadow.

Then she sprang up. “Oh, Aunt Aurelia!” she cried, in surprise.

The arms opened to her. She laid her cheek on the elder woman's shoulder, while her young arms clasped the trembling frame. For some time neither spoke, then Dell said caressingly, comfortingly:

“Dear Aunt Aurelia!”

“Did you know that Leonard came?”

“Yes.” Then Dell drew up the high-backed easy-chair, with its pretty silken cushions she and Milly had manufactured with such pride. She placed Aunt Aurelia in it—by her own fireside, too, odd thought—and drew up her own chair so close that she could lean over on the other's shoulder. She took the hand in hers.

“My dear, you knew what Leonard had to tell me?”

The voice shook with the very effort to keep it steady. It had the sound and weakness that betray coming age.

"Yes, he told me in Washington. He came down to see his father. Oh, are you bitterly disappointed?"

"Couldn't you have loved him, Lyndell?"

At the moment Dell was sorry things had gone otherwise. The girl's desire to please them all swept over her again. Then she gave thanks that it was out of her power.

"I think it was a good deal of trying on both sides." Her own voice was a trifle tremulous.

"My dear, women have forgiven worse things than that mistake with Miss Garcia."

"I forgave him. I do not think he was to blame for anything deeper than thoughtlessness. I was angry at first, but I soon came back to the old regard. I did not really feel as indignant as a girl in love should have felt. Last spring, the day he brought me home for the funeral, we talked it over. Since then, at least for a while, he honestly tried to love me, I do believe. And I did try to love him."

"Then I do not see"—with a great puzzle in the tone.

"The divine something that makes a true and perfect love did not meet in us. I suppose God must have meant it to be that way, since both were willing to try. And I wanted to give him Sherburne House."

Aunt Aurelia gave a long sigh that seemed to come over tears.

"I have hoped you would both be here. I felt quite certain this winter. But I have no desire to make you unhappy. I have come to love you very much. And it may be a just punishment for my unwillingness to give you your just rights. In those days I would gladly have crowded you out for him. And now he leaves us both!"

"No, he will never leave us unless we send him away. I think he will love us better as time goes on. His manhood will be richer, truer. You have all said he was growing like his father. And will it be quite impossible to love Tessy in the new relation?"

There was a little silence. "We all liked her," the elder woman said tentatively, as if afraid of admitting too much in the beginning.

"And Leonard loves her very much. But I know she will not come to him without a heartfelt welcome from us all. She hesitated even before he had spoken. And Mr. Murray did not consent easily."

"Child, I do not suppose anyone will oppose it," Miss Sherburne returned, with some petulance. "It would be of no avail. And we have all had one bitter lesson. No, no! let them be happy in their own way. I wish I had said as much for your father."

She was crying then.

Was there a curious sort of retribution in it? Dell thought so only an instant; her generous nature dismissed the idea before it had time to root itself.

"Dear Aunt Aurelia, you will have me always, I think. I am afraid I lack something that wins love——"

"No, no, child, you do not. It is not your fault he is blind. You are worth dozens of Tessy Murrays."

That was an ebullition of temper.

"Am I worth so much to you? I confess I should not like to be crowded out of everyone's heart, even by my dearest friend."

She kissed the soft, wrinkled cheek.

"I put you in your father's place. He was like an own child to me. No one can crowd you out. But

I want you to be happy, to have some joys of your very own. I had a great many things. I was mother to my brother's children, and he needed me. But you stand so alone."

"Then we will call in the children's children," and Dell laughed with rare tenderness. "You and I—and we might take in Cousin Carrick."

"Leonard spoke of it at Christmas."

"And Tessy proposed or rather suggested it last summer. That is a funny coincidence! We were speaking of her lonely lot when Miss Maria would have gone. Yes, let us keep her."

"Two old women. You had better find some more."

Aunt Aurelia's tone had a touch of amusement in it that was curiously cheering.

"Well, I will see. However, we shall not be lonesome. And we will let Aunt Julia go down to Fortress Monroe every little while to cheer Uncle Dick. Oh, you will find that we shall get along very nicely. And you will not hold hard thoughts of Leonard?"

"He has disappointed me."

"But he is doing so well, and in the face of a great many temptations. There are so much drinking and gambling, everyone says. He is admired so warmly on every hand! You really should see him in society. And I honor him that he has the good sense to chose a sweet, domestic woman who will never think children a trouble, and who will swing before him continually the censer of love. He will be very happy." Dell's voice seemed to have a smile in it.

Aunt Aurelia gave a little sound of half disdain.

"My dear," after a while, "if he had treated you badly in ever so slight a degree I never should have

forgiven him. But you do not love him in that fashion, or you would be a little hurt by his preference, and the fact of being supplanted"—by your friend, she was about to say, but checked herself.

"No, Aunt Aurelia, I do not think Tessy supplanted me. She couldn't help seeing that Leonard was unusually attractive. And she and Mr. Murray both advised him to take me. Perhaps I've been thrown at him too much."

She gave a sweet, heartsome laugh.

"There are others who would be glad of the opportunity," Aunt Aurelia declared, in high disdain.

A knock roused them. Philly came in.

"Here's your lamp, Miss Dell; and Miss Stanwood wants to know if you've seen Miss Sherburne? She's mighty 'feared—oh!" and Philly paused and stared. "They've been lookin' for you high and low."

"I am glad I am of so much account," said Miss Sherburne dryly.

"They were waitin' to ring the supper bell."

"Go down and ring it, then."

Miss Sherburne paused and took Dell in a fond embrace. Were there tears as well as kisses?

Dell was very bright all supper time, and afterward entertained Miss Eliza with descriptions of some of the grand "functions," and a reception at the White House; the beautiful gowns, and the splendid tables with their glitter of plate and fragrance of flowers. She was not at all unhappy. She had found a work of love. And Leonard's announcement had not brought as much consternation as she expected.

She went to Beaumanoir the next afternoon. The rain had softened to little showers, and made all the air sweet with hints and odors of spring. Dell drew

in long, revivifying breaths, and her pulses were all astir with new life.

Milly had a severe headache and was in bed. Aunt Beaumanoir was alone in the library.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried; "we wanted *you* so! We are heartbroken over this dreadful business! But you can't reason with Leonard. And when one thinks of all you have been to him! The only redeeming feature in it is that he has counted on Sherburne House, I am afraid, and now he has given it up grandly. But Dell, you will always be like an own child to us. And Aunt Aurelia must be bitterly disappointed!"

"She takes it better than I feared. Oh, Aunt Beaumanoir, think that it is for Leonard's happiness!"

"Dell Sherburne, the man who could not be happy with you ought not be happy at all."

Dell laughed with a kind of tender gayety. Then Aunt Beaumanoir smiled and sent her up to Milly. She could not talk about it.

"Len deserves a good deal of credit for his bravery," Millicent said. "He was very gentle, too. Of course there is nothing but to make the best of it, and since it isn't *very* bad—the greatest disappointment lies in another direction. But we shall keep you."

"I am glad to be kept. And you will all like Tessy."

"He thinks her an angel. I never expected him to be so enthusiastic. And do you remember the little 'flare' he and Bertram had about the Murrays when Bert was down here? I thought it odd."

"You have never seen him really in love," Dell returned gravely.

"We seem to have fallen upon episodes of love-making. It will be your turn next."

"I am going to wait a while. I won't come in at the fag end," with a pretty show of petulance. "Violet, Alice, and Tessy. That is enough for one season. I want all the glories to myself."

"There will be plenty of time," said Millicent. "And, Dell, there are so many things we shall enjoy together. I wished for you so in New York. There was much in the bright talk to bring out the best of one. Yet I couldn't help thinking that some of the great truths and new ideas they seemed to discover were bits of the old truths Dr. Carew and dear Miss Neale have always been living out grandly. And I saw a little of what papa is so afraid: that women will squander their mental riches in a sort of riotous living, and have nothing for sure rest and refreshing when night and trouble come, and disappointments sweep away some precious dreams. The old ways have much good and loveliness in them, and wives and mothers ought to be capable of standing at the head and doing noble work for the world. But their best efforts may be in their children's development. Perhaps we may never find anything better than love. I have made some delightful new friends, and we will enjoy them together. We will try to get a little of our ideal life."

"It is lovely in you to include me," Dell replied, with emotion.

"I feel now quite as if you belonged to me. It is odd how we have transferred you to Leonard. I am afraid in certain ways you would have outgrown him. He isn't what you would call an intellectual man, and he is not going to be a broad man, excepting on certain lines. Intellectuality doesn't always mean happiness.

It often brings unrest and dissatisfaction—that grasping at vague things afar off, while the real things and absolute truths are near by. And perhaps he will be just as happy. But it seems to be a violent turn-over everywhere, and I am rather chaotic.”

“You must not talk any more, with your headache. Can’t I read to you?”

“There are two or three volumes of poems—new books of the winter—that are sweet and comforting. I have often thought how much pleasure three or four simple verses sometimes give one in a depressed moment, when you would not feel equal to any great effort of thought. I like the term ‘minor poets.’ It suggests minor music, twilight music, ‘when the cares of the day are done’.”

Dell glanced them over and selected one that seemed as if the author had been going over flowery meads and bosky dells, and culled here and there a handful of flowers.

She bathed Millicent’s head with some fragrant water, and settling herself in an easy-chair, skimmed from one bit of verse to another, until she found her time had expired.

“Dell, have you ever realized what a beautiful, flexible voice you have? It seems so to enter into the very heart of things when you read.”

“Thank you.” She bent and kissed her cousin with a gratified light in her eyes. “I am glad I have one charm. I may have to go from ‘land to land,’ like the ‘Ancient Mariner,’ and tell my story,” laughingly.

“My headache is all gone. I must get up and comfort papa a little. Dell, you must be more of a daughter than ever.”

Going slowly homeward, she was thinking about Tessy. She had not said much in her behalf, for she knew Leonard must have been extravagant in her praise. How much did Tessy love him? Would she love him as well when she came to see more of him, came to know all the little foibles and selfishness? Yes, he was selfish. He wanted a good deal, and he was not given to thinking whether other people had much or little. Suppose presently she should be disenchanted?

Lyndell shuddered at that.

Miss Carrick was pacing up and down the porch with a wistful kind of light in her eyes.

"It is lovely, isn't it?" she said. "I wanted 'Relia to go out, but she didn't feel like it. There is not much pleasure going alone. You can stand it for errands and business. You see, I've never really been alone, as one may say."

"Come out with me, then," and Dell made room in the phaeton.

"But you have been out."

"I am ready to go again," smilingly.

She looked uncertain, then desirous, and went for her bonnet.

"'Relia feels quite done up. Your uncle was over. Julia told me——"

She studied Dell with a minuteness that brought a flush to the girl's cheek, who looked away as she turned Bonny, instead of going around the drive.

"It seems an awful surprise," began Miss Carrick. "Of course we had all settled to it, though why you should be expected to make Leonard a clear out-and-out present of Sherburne House, unless you *did* want to marry him!" She paused and drew in her breath

as if to settle her confused sentence. "He is a splendid young fellow, and it is queer that little Murray girl should get him—now, isn't it?"

"He doesn't quite know whether she will take him, after all," said Dell, rather nettled. "She would not in December."

"Well, now!" Miss Carrick seemed utterly amazed, and looked at Dell in a helpless way. "Seems to me as if any girl might be proud to take Len Beaumanoir."

"Tessy Murray has had several admirers. A year ago a young man was very much in love with her. His father was a great railroad man and had a fortune up in the millions. And I shouldn't wonder if some California nabob had fallen in love with her. She is so sweet and pretty and winsome."

"She is all that. Maria and I liked her so much. We talked afterward—if Fred had only had two or three girls and one of them would have come to us. But I thought ever so long ago—not that their being Irish would ever trouble *me*. We've always been proud of our Irish blood. I have an old miniature, most faded out now, of a daughter of one of the Dukes of Carrick, who married and came over here, and made her husband keep the name. It's two hundred or so years old. And then some Carrick cousin came out and *her* daughter married him. Our mother was a Sherburne, your great-grandfather's sister. And we've French and English blood. So long as it's good and honorable it can't matter what nation it belongs to. And our people marry foreigners and give them their money, if they happen to have a title, where sometimes they are not as good as ordinary people."

"I hope everybody will love Tessy for my sake as well as Leonard's. When I think how good the Murrays were to me—and my own mamma might have been mistaken about the will, you know. Or if no one from Sherburne had looked me up, I should always have been treated as their very own. Mr. Murray never would take any compensation for those years of care; and if I were there, I should share everything with Tessy, journeys and all. So I am desirous of sharing something with her, you see," and Dell gave a winsome smile.

"You have a big heart, my dear."

"But they loved and cared for me first."

Miss Carrick thought of the greater love that had "loved first," and her heart warmed to them all in that moment. Dell certainly wasn't disappointed. She had never looked sweeter nor happier. But she couldn't understand Leonard giving up so great an heiress as his cousin.

"I have a warm place in my heart for Len, and I certainly shall love his wife, if she makes him happy," the lady said.

"As she surely will," appended Dell.

"And she's a pretty little thing! Only you two would have made such a splendid-looking couple," with a touch of regret in her tone.

When she saw Uncle Beaumanoir the next day he took her in his arms and held her some minutes in wordless tenderness. Then he kissed her with fatherly kisses, and she knew how infinitely dear she was to him.

Then a long letter came from Leonard, detailing some of the incidents of his announcement to his parents.

"I don't know why anyone should want to really persecute you into marrying me, or insist that *I* should wring a mere cousinly consent from you and be satisfied with it. Dell, your fortune might tempt any man, and I am mortified and ashamed that I should ever have set my heart on Sherburne House. You know I am a better fellow for giving it up. Still, there were times when I did love you dearly, and you could have made me a rapturous, enthusiastic lover. But few men, I think, love long against the tide. Not that the tide was such a swift-flowing one with Tessy, save for a brief hour or two. But I knew then what it was to conquer a woman's whole soul. I think, if I became the veriest scoundrel on earth, Tessy would love me still, even if she would not marry me. And I am beginning to think, in a country like ours, to be honest and upright and to have no family disgrace and no vulgarities is to be well born. There are men here in Washington who have made every shift to get along and struck a streak of luck, as we call it, that has lifted them up to the topmost round, who are ostentatious, purse-proud, uneducated, and care little for true refinement. Still they are received in society, and often courted for the power they wield. Mr. Murray is a courteous, kindly, quiet gentleman, who is giving his children the best advantages, yet not being foolish with them. Con is a fine, ambitious fellow that will make his mark in the world and be welcomed anywhere. James is going to do some good work, and his father can put a fortune in his way. Morna is picturesque enough to marry a prince, if we had any American princes, and I only hope the others won't grow up too fast. As for Tessy, I could fill pages with her sweet perfections, but you know them

all. Her gentleness will temper my too lordly ways that Violet used to talk about. She can yield her will sweetly when duty requires, but she is not weak or silly. She can entertain in the most charming manner, and be the delight of a crowd of children. I went to see them on South Bay last summer, and I thought then she was one of the loveliest daughters and sisters I had ever met, and all my life has been passed with superior ones, as you well know. Oh, Dell! how good you three girls have been to me! And I wonder just here if in that delightful summer in Germany you could have loved that enthusiastic young Baron Zahn, if I had not played the jealous ogre? Dell, you must have many things to forgive!"

There was much more. Dell smiled over it, and yet a strange sadness diffused itself through her very soul. She was not so different from her kind, but what she had dreamed of losing herself in a love like this. But if it never came to her!

Human nature usually adapts itself to the inevitable in well-disciplined minds. Perhaps they accepted Leonard's decision the sooner, remembering the sad ending of Edward Sherburne's romance, that forgiveness might have restored to a long and happy life. Leonard had shown more courage and decision, and certainly Miss Murray had a standing of her own.

Had they all something to make up to Lyndell? It seemed so. Everyone was solicitous about her pleasures and happiness. They began to talk of a grand birthday party at Sherburne House when she attained her majority.

"I wish it was a year away, Aunt Aurelia," she said emphatically. "I feel sometimes like a little girl

who ought to be scolded for wayward moods, and remain under 'governors, teachers, and masters.' I don't want to be Miss Sherburne of Sherburne House. I told Mr. Whittingham so the other day, and begged him and Uncle Beaumanoir to go on just the same. But he said they could only be trustees. I hope you told him you did not want to be relieved of any care?"

"Indeed, my child, I said most decisively that I did. I used to be fond of business and proud of my ability, but through the accident your uncle would not allow me to trouble about it. There is still a good deal to do for the negroes, and it needs a man now to keep everything in shape, and see that they really care for the ground they rent, and are sober and industrious, even in their fashion. But I want to give it all up. And it is too much care for your youth. So it will be a good thing for your uncle to take the whole charge."

Dell had never "interfered," but she had made a more generous allowance for the school, and many a small gift had gladdened a cabin fireside. But she had learned her highest and best wisdom from Miss Neale, that patient supervision was the wisest generosity.

"A birthday party," she said, in a kind of impersonal manner.

"You have never had a real party for your own self. Something has been happening all the time. Aunt Julia was speaking of it. And you have been away——"

"I must make up my mind to stay at home now, as a person of some consequence." Her brave, sweet eyes smiled down on Aunt Aurelia as she was standing by her chair.

"My dear, you can have only one youth. And it is

right to lay up treasures of remembrance for later years." She dropped into a half absent thought for some seconds.

"Oh, the party!" she said, rousing. "Milly was over while you were at the doctor's yesterday. She and Aunt Julia discussed various arrangements. It must be in the daytime, for Mr. Whittingham seldom goes out in the evening."

"An outdoors fête!" cried Dell, with sudden delight. "The 20th of April. Everything will be enchanting, unless a cold spell comes to spoil it all. But the house will be large enough. Oh, whom will we get to fill it?"

"We must ask—everybody."

Then Aunt Aurelia gave a short, embarrassed laugh. There were so few of Dell's individual friends.

"All the neighborhood, yes. And the Baltimore relatives with the other Miss Sherburne. But we can't have Violet and Mr. Amory; and Alice is so far away."

"Wasn't there something about Mr. Osborne coming?"

"Oh, there *was* a suggestion of business in May or June—a flying trip. I mean to write at once and see."

Dell was toying with the soft hair growing snowy white very fast now. The little square of fine lace always looked so pretty and delicate.

Aunt Aurelia reached up and took the firm young hand with its eager, buoyant pulses.

"Is there no one else you would like? It is your house, you know."

The voice was hesitating, but suggestive of some favor that might be granted. It had an inquiring accent.

"Oh, Aunt Aurelia, you don't mean—do you think I might—include the Murrays?"

Then Dell trembled at her own half hope.

"My dear child, the awkwardness must be surmounted somehow. Under other circumstances there would not be any. Tessy has been here, and Mr. Murray came that first time, you remember!"

That old glad time, when it seemed as if the whole heavens had opened and were showering blessings down upon her! Ah, yes! she could never forget that!

"If Mr. and Mrs. Murray and some of the older children would come? They would be your guests, and could meet your aunt and uncle. Nothing need be said about the recent occurrence."

She stumbled a little over that.

"Oh, Aunt Aurelia! it would be splendid—if no one would feel—that I had taken a great liberty."

"You are the only one who can take it. Millicent could not invite them to Beaumanoir. And when the ice is really broken——"

"It is lovely in you to think of it. Oh, can I? Dare I?" and her voice was tremulous with joy.

"Ask Millicent—and write to Leonard. My dear, when one is nearing threescore and ten one is apt to dwell more on 'the things that make for peace.' Someone must take a step toward the other side, and others will follow. It would be very pointed to leave them out. But give it to Milly as your own suggestion."

"Con and Tessy are expected home early in April."

"You have not much time to waste."

"I think I will go over and see Milly."

She kissed Aunt Aurelia and ordered out Bonny.

Milly was in her pretty study, that had been the nursery. But now Miss Nora was promoted to a room of her own, adjoining her mother's. It was so beautifully appointed that Dell declared anyone ought to be able to write stories in it. Milly had made no rigid rules. She had been her father's companion so much since Violet's marriage, and he had a rather grudging suspicion that this new delight and occupation would take her from him; yet he was beginning to be quite proud of her gift, when he realized its power for pleasure.

"Oh, you are busy!" cried Dell. "I have not come to distract your ideas, unless—well, it *is* a consultation," smiling a little. "We have been discussing a grand birthday party."

"Yes? Papa thinks it admirable. Oh, Dell! it seems only such a brief while ago you were a sick little girl at Dr. Carew's."

The bright tears flashed to Dell's eyes.

"Everybody has been laid under contribution to me. I must give back seven years' service."

Milly laughed at that.

Then Dell preferred her request. Her cousin colored with a curious rush of feeling, but satisfaction predominated.

"I think it will be—very nice is rather tame, but it is hard to find just the word. Of course the matter must be gotten over with, no painful places in it to remember. Personally there can be no objection to Tessy Murray. She is sweet, pretty, well-bred, and I am sure she has had enough admiration to turn any weak mind. Hers does not seem turned at all. We shall never feel afraid of little blunders or those annoying ignorances on her part that you often find in the

rather new people. I can't imagine Leonard choosing such a wife out of all the world of girls, and yet she may be just the one for him. I know we shall all come to love her dearly."

It was sensible and good, but Dell longed for more enthusiasm. She was a little hurt.

"It is very noble and generous in you and Aunt Aurelia to take the onus of it. We could go up to New York and see them. Mamma half proposed that."

"Oh!" cried Dell, her eyes almost shining with tears.

"Mamma is anxious to see the other mother. *Do* you think she could be persuaded to come, Dell?"

"I am going to ask as many as can or will come. I once threatened to have the whole crowd at Sherburne House." The young girl laughed a little with something between joy and tears at the old remembrance—the daring threat, as it was then—that had served to keep her courage alive.

"And that will be lovely and gracious toward us. My dear Dell, we shall appreciate this opportunity more truly than any words of mine can persuade you now. You know I admired them all years ago, and we have taken Tessy into our circle. It is only the strangeness of it, the——"

Millicent hesitated and flushed deeply. Dell turned scarlet as well, almost in vexation.

"Dear Dell, forgive us all. You can't quite understand——"

"I think I *do* understand," Dell began, with secret indignation. She did not want to be angry with Millicent, with any of them. But there was a certain pride of birth hard to overcome. Someone would no

doubt remember Mr. Murray's humble beginnings. But if Leonard did not care, and if Aunt Aurelia could accept it gracefully——

Millicent sprang up and caught Dell's hands.

"You are making a mistake," she cried earnestly. "I don't know that *we* could give the Murray family the standing in the neighborhood that we would like. You see yourself they would not come to us. And this is why it is doubly gracious for you to ask them on your birthday. It doesn't confess or admit anything, but if anyone chooses to surmise"—she was smiling faintly. "Of course," she resumed in a moment or two, as Dell remained speechless, "we *have* a good deal of pride of birth. We made you suffer from it, and I shall always be glad we came to love you so well before we knew of your grand relatives. I suppose if Mr. Murray had come over in 1600, he would belong to the best old families in the land. But with us it is not money merely; some of our old families are very poor. Some of the best old families in New York have been pushed to the wall and dropped out, because they could not compete with wealth thrusting itself in everywhere. And it has been no drawback to many of our eminent men that they have come up from the ranks. You see"—she colored with embarrassment—"our efforts would be considered as making the best of it; yours are the result of a lovely friendship."

Dell began to look less austere. There was some truth in all this. And she had learned a good deal about certain unwritten codes and beliefs that society accepted, promulgated—and sometimes turned around and defied them.

"Leonard's wife would receive a warm welcome

from us, you know, Dell. Why, we should even have taken in that little waif of fortune, Anita Garcia, if Leonard had loved her; taken her in and educated her, and made the most of her. There is nothing to do for Tessy but just love her and give her the rightful place among us. She will be dear to us because she was your friend, and if, sometimes, we sigh a little over the girl we should have liked in her place—— Oh, Dell! tell me again solemnly that you never could have loved Leonard in a wifely manner, even if he had waited years——”

“Set your heart entirely at rest, Milly.” She was smiling now, though tears stood in her eyes. She realized part of their objection had come from a jealous love for her, from the desire to have her among them in a nearer and tenderer tie. “I think I shall love Leonard better for his courage in loving and waiting, and, yes—persisting.”

“It did not require much courage to love a pretty and charming girl, whom you almost know will adore you when the right time comes. I only hope she won’t allow him to degenerate into a tyrant. And if they are very happy—— Come, let us find mamma and tell her of the plan,” Millicent finished abruptly.

“But your writing, your train of thought that I interrupted?”

“That can be summoned another time. At all events, it has vanished now. Dell, do you know, we have been dangerously near a difference? But when you feel hurt,—if you ever do again,—think of our loss and how hard it is to put a new face in the frame that years and love have hallowed.”

She clasped Dell in a tender embrace, and they went to Mrs. Beaumanoir’s room.

CHAPTER XIX.

COMING INTO HER KINGDOM.

MRS. BEAUMANOIR did more than merely give the plan her warmest approval and express her delight to Dell. Leonard announced that the travelers had returned. He had gone at once to New York and interviewed everybody but Tessy that first evening. She had been very glad to plead fatigue and retire to bed.

Con's astonishment knew no bounds. To be asked to accept this handsome, aristocratic young man as his brother-in-law almost deprived him of breath. And Mrs. Murray, sweet soul, thought that if Tessy loved him, and everybody at Beaumanoir and Sherburne House consented, it was all right.

"They will give their assent," said Leonard. "Consent is simply between Tessy and myself."

Mr. Murray shook his head. "I must be assured that nothing will ever be said or done to wound her. She has an enthusiastic friend in your cousin."

"And in my sister, in everyone. Oh, indeed you need never fear! Even if we have kept to some of the old theories," and he laughed lightly. "But we modern young men," glancing at Con, "understand the worth of the fine-line drawing, and that personal qualification and character are of more real importance in the great march of life than the bluest blood. Maybe you have judged us a good deal from the unfortunate beginning with my cousin. That was made

possible from a series of misunderstandings, and my grandfather was a very proud man. But I chose Tessy because I loved her, and I do not know any man who has a right to be prouder of his family than you."

"Still, I can understand the feeling——"

"That rightly belongs to the elders, to the people who live in a small round, like those of my own county, and I think they are outgrowing it. It is really no longer possible. We meet in Washington men of every degree, who have made their way up from nothing. Their sons and daughters are to be the aristocrats of the next generation," and he smiled. "And I have come to consider the most honorable birth that of integrity, trustworthiness, and unstained lineage. That is all I ask, and Miss Murray meets every requirement. You will find my father not unreasonable since these points are all satisfactory."

"And Miss Sherburne?" exclaimed Con, rather incredulously. "It is one thing to welcome Dell Sherburne's friends, but quite another thing to marry among them."

"She is very fond of Tessy. Oh! you need not fear."

"She *is* a fine, strong woman. I shall always remember and respect her manner of making amends," declared Mr. Murray. "As you say, the beginning was unfortunate, but that is no reason why we should hold to it when it is past and forgiven. But we are proud as well. I shouldn't want it said that my daughter came to Sherburne House—why, you were to marry your cousin!"

"And she declined. Am I so very much to blame for that?"

Leonard smiled ingenuously and looked extremely winning, as with rising color he glanced from one to the other.

"One can never be quite sure of immunity from temptation. I think I have coveted Sherburne House. But when I came to love truly, with my whole soul, that did not stand in the way a moment. And if you know my cousin well, you will understand we are too near and too true friends ever to be anything nearer. It is my purpose to win Miss Murray if I have to wait years. But I ask the right to do it openly and honorably."

Could one refuse such a lover? Not when the happiness of his child was at stake.

So Leonard Beaumanoir won the coveted permission. And that evening he wrote a long letter to Dell.

"I've had to fight hard," he said. "The Murrays are quite as proud as we, but it may be considered as settled. I do not expect everyone to fall down and worship my little fairy princess at once, but I know she will win them all in the end."

"I can't believe it!" Con Murray said to his father. "If he wasn't so frank and open about it; but that does stamp it as being in earnest. I suppose he could marry almost anyone, with that handsome face and winning tongue. It is a kind of poetical justice to have Tessy set there in the midst of all the great people. What does Carew say to it?"

"Why, he thinks it the grandest step of the young man's life, especially relinquishing Sherburne House."

Con gave a soft, prolonged whistle.

"Well, they were mightily in love with Tessy out at Belmont, Mrs. Osborne and all of them. Strange,

what a power a girl has! But I'm just dying to see Dell. Do you suppose she really wouldn't have her cousin?"

"Something happened between them. And I am not sure at all that Dell ever was in love with him. But I do know that little Tessy has given him her whole heart," and the father sighed.

But whatever they hesitated over was brought to a more definite conclusion a few days later by two letters: one a very considerate and motherly one from Mrs. Beaumanoir to Mrs. Murray, the other a glowing and urgent one from Lyndell, concerning the birthday plans.

"The poor mother!" Mrs. Murray said, in a pitying tone that would have roused Mrs. Beaumanoir almost to indignation if she could have heard it. "The poor mother! I don't wonder she feels anxious. Think if it was Con! We should like to know about the girl he was going to marry, and what her people were, and have them nice and respectable. But they have all seen Tessy. And though they were very grand years ago, don't you think, Con, people soften like when they come to know each other better? I'm sure they have all grown lovely to Dell. And that beautiful Miss Milly! Oh, you remember how she came and told us about the poor little homesick colleen after her long illness!"

The tears were shining in Mrs. Murray's eyes, and made them so exquisitely tender that a sight of her would have disarmed the last vestige of Millicent's lingering pride. For they were proud with that fine family feeling that comes of a long line of honorable ancestry, of education and refinement.

"We will have to give in," Mr. Murray said, with a

regret almost amusing. "The young man is bound to have Tessy, and she's that deep in love with him it would take her years to get over it. There have been some other fine men, and do you know, I half hoped a while that it would be Dr. Carew. There's so much breadth and tenderness and uprightness to him. Surely the father must be proud of such a son!"

"As if we didn't have Con and Jamsie, and there's Lawrence, a fine lad, who declares he is going to be a doctor."

There was a touch of jealousy in her tone, but it was from overflowing mother love.

"And what will we do about this birthday party? You will have to go, sure."

"Oh, Con! Among Lyndell's great folks!"

Mrs. Murray shrank in dismayed entreaty.

"They're no greater than many people you have been in the habit of meeting the last few years. And though the homes have that kind of old-world grandeur and simplicity, there is more that's showy on the very block with us. There are more pretentious manners and people around us every day, and we hardly give them a second thought, much less stand in awe of them. We are asking nothing of them, Densie, but to be let to live our own sweet, natural lives that are so much to us. It will be different with the children. They can't help marching on a little higher ground, and I am trying to fit them for it, so that they may get the real good and wholesome pleasure out of life, and not be ashamed, when they come to die, of only having cumbered the ground instead of raising the sweet herbs of the soul to leave a fragrance behind. Let me read Dell's letter over."

She had made no mention of the engagement. It was the party. That day she should come into full possession of her father's heritage, and she wanted her dearest friends to congratulate her, to be with her. She wished they could bring all the children, but surely Baby Densie, Morna, and Tessy, and all of the boys who had not forgotten her. Aunt Aurelia would be glad to give them the warmest welcome. Tessy had so many friends already among them. It was a very small return for all their goodness in the past, but Heaven had blessed them with so much prosperity that all she could do was to remember gratefully the time when she had come a stranger to their gates, and they had taken her in so cordially; of the love and care they had given her dear mother. She could only offer them love for love, and beg them to come to her as frankly as she had always come to them.

Con Murray winked his eyes very hard. Ah, he had been quite right when he told Miss Sherburne, out of his implicit faith in the child, that he could trust to her loyalty. Nothing had ever weakened it. He was proud of her love for them all, and to-day he felt prouder of his success in life, because it had kept them more within her sphere. Yet he understood even poverty would have been no bar to her.

If only that handsome, beguiling, foolish young man had chosen elsewhere! One could not doubt his love, yet Constantine Murray was honestly sorry it had happened. The triumph of it had not a feather's weight with him.

Of course they must go. Con, junior, accepted his invitation at once in a characteristic letter. He and Dell had kept up a very fragmentary correspondence

during the last two years. He was so full of fun and adventure; he possessed such diverse gifts, developed by the many-sided education, and shaped by keen discrimination and not a little natural wit.

As for a profession, he was in no real hurry to decide. Civil engineering in its greater forms had attracted him; chemical sciences had been another fascination, and this Dr. Carew had quite insisted upon his taking up in earnest; and now he had gone over to the mighty power of the press. He had great force of character and determination, he longed for influence and ability to take up the vital questions of the day. His quick insight, his ready humor, his sudden changes from grave to gay made him a charming companion for men older than himself, while his native good sense and modesty kept him from aggressiveness.

Morna was quite delighted. She bid fair to uphold the family dignity and ambitions. A tall and very striking-looking girl, with a willowy, lissome figure, an abundance of hair between flaxen and golden, like a ripple of a lake in sunshine, and a marvelous complexion. No one remarked that her face was not a pure oval, that when the roundness of youth was gone her cheekbones would be rather high, and that her nose was full short, or her mouth a trifle wide, since the lips were full of distracting curves. Her blue eyes, not very dark, held both sun and shadow, gayety and pathos, and already she was in quite demand for society.

As for Con, he was a bright, fresh, good-looking young fellow, much what his father had been at his age, but in him the intellectual would join hands with the practical.

Lyndell was delighted with her answers. James was just now so busy that two or three holidays might work havoc with his plans. Morna expressed her pleasure gracefully. Tessy's note was rather timid. She would not come beforehand, as Dell had entreated, but she would remain afterward, if it would give pleasure to anyone.

Mr. Murray replied for himself and his wife. Several sentences moved Dell's heart deeply. She could understand his hesitation at the proposed tie between them, and wondered if even the Beaumanoirs would give him credit for so much delicacy.

"I must take this letter over to Millicent," she said.

She knew it was best to be patient rather than resentful. Time would soften the little feeling that could hardly be called real objection.

"If she makes him very happy I shall be content; perhaps he does not need an ambitious wife," said her uncle.

"But Tessy will be very ambitious for him," laughed Dell. "She is the one content to sit in the reflected light, to shine at the fireside. Oh, Uncle Beaumanoir! I do not think Len could have made a wiser choice, if he wanted exquisite happiness. I never was his ideal girl: I always felt that."

But she seemed to be her uncle's, for all Leonard had been blind. Was it not rather her own clear sight that had saved them both?

They were very busy at Sherburne House. Dinah insisted upon every nook and corner undergoing a thorough renovation for "Missy." Hosts of accumulations were sent down to the "quarters."

"But not a piece of the old-fashioned furniture,"

declared Dell emphatically. "I want everything as it has always been; as it was when papa was a boy."

Aunt Aurelia looked up with a grateful smile.

Miss Carrick had talked a little about going home when the festivities were over. Dell strenuously insisted this should be her home, that she should remain for company when the others went away.

"Aunt Julia and I will feel so much more at ease if there is someone to keep Aunt Aurelia from being lonely. I mean to have a good gay time now, and later on, when you both get old, I shall repay all the kindnesses with interest."

"You have a sweet, generous heart, Dell Sherburne. You make me think of your father. He was always wanting people around to be bright and happy."

Oh, how could they ever have given him over to those toilsome years away from them all!

Dell's next great surprise was a telegram from Belmont.

The Osbornes were sure to accept. Lady Ashton and the colonel and Gifford must be content with sending good wishes.

Leonard came down himself, perhaps a little nervous about the part that so nearly concerned him.

"No words can thank you, Dell," he said, in a voice unsteady with emotion. "It was a splendid idea all through. I am glad to have the Murrays introduced under your wing, for I haven't become such a radical that I am for throwing down all the fences of society. I dare say, when I get to be fifty and a judge, I shall be a fine old aristocrat, attaining to father's ideals. Aunt Aurelia's have so softened that I hardly know her, and there is no fear

about her welcome. I am delighted that so many of them are coming."

"It was my long ago dream to have them here, but I did not imagine, in my child's narrow experience, that it would all work out so harmoniously."

"There is nothing to be said — not even to Ethel——"

He looked at her with questioning entreaty.

"You will tell it yourself in a hundred ways," Lyn-dell laughed. "You will be like Miss Muloch's lover, 'go in and out with a shout'."

"Then you must shut me up and keep me on bread and water. Why," complainingly, "I've hardly been allowed to see Tessy at all. Mrs. Fanshawe is a veritable dragon; Con hangs around and talks, and really, Dell, you would be surprised to know the amount of knowledge he has picked up in his tour around the world. I count on Milly taking a tremendous fancy to him; two of a trade, you know, though Con hasn't come to books yet."

Was here another trophy to float down to Millicent? She crushed out the sudden jealous thought.

Leonard was pacing up and down the room.

"There is one quality I like extremely in Mr. Murray. I fell in love with Mrs. Murray last summer, you know. I never saw anything so lovely as that little woman with her flock of children about her. But as to him. Self-made men, and men who carve out their own fortunes, are so apt to fall into an egotistical way of talking about their past and their struggles, as if living on the lowest round, and doing the most menial work, was the start and ought to be glorified. It isn't what the man did; it is the strength of purpose, the ambition and determination that

make him. It is what he becomes. Your favorite, Carlyle, said that years ago. I hope I shouldn't be ashamed of humble beginnings, if I *had* begun humble, but I sometimes listen to the talk of men in our own great capital that sickens me. A man may be a hewer of wood all his life, and the world none the better for it. But if he rises it isn't on account of the wood, or the strength of his arm, and if Mr. Murray had been one of those blatant egotists I couldn't have endured it. He simply lets the past alone, or refers to it in a manner that dignifies it and him. The natural inbred courtesy is worth a fortune."

"He always was a gentleman. I am afraid I was the most unpromising. Oh, that day Aunt Aurelia first saw me!" Dell laughed and gave a little sob, while her eyes overflowed. "I think I *was* at my worst."

Leonard drew her to his heart and held her a moment.

"But you have been at your best so many, many times! Dell, I think the last three months I have grown glad with an exceeding great joy that you dropped among us just as you did. It brought out all our meannesses, our selfish, narrow, grudging spirit—we who prided ourselves so on our superiority. I don't wonder, coming from such a family as the Murrays, you were shocked by our overweening pride, our pragmatistical arrogance, our pretensions, and oh, our coldness and cruelty! If Tessy should ever be jealous of this adoration of you! But she never will, sweet, humble little soul! I hope the best of all, which will be the love of a man a hundred times better and nobler than I, will come to you, and that Sherburne House will be the happiest home in all the county."

Dell was crying then, softly in a kind of moved, grateful manner, and yet with a curious dread of future solitariness.

"It is queer and inexplicable," he went on, "that, coming so near, we should never have touched that divine point of fusion called love. It makes one understand the sacredness of it, the mightiness, the high obligation of human souls to wait for, to take the best. Heaven grant it may come to you, my dear cousin! And we must all strive to add our portion. I am glad I bring to you your dearest friend. And it will be my highest aim to make her happy."

Yes, he was very much in love. So many new thoughts and feelings had come to him. Some chord in his full voice touched her keenly nowadays. A kind of reverent tenderness had grown up in him. Tessy had worked changes no one else could have brought about, and most of all the change in his self-consciousness and pride.

She, Dell, had not done it all.

But how much she had done, how much influence for good or ill we all work on each other can only be known when every man receives his reward for the work of his own hands.

What lovely days these were, with the multifold fragrances of spring! And if indoors shone in its renovation, out-of-doors went through the same process. Trees were trimmed, straggling shrubbery made shapely, paths raked and rolled; the negro quarters whitewashed and made attractive with vines. Everything wore a gala aspect.

Beaumanoir was to be opened to guests as well. Ethel and her mother came down for a little visit,

"Is it true that Dell is to have the Murray tribe down?" asked Mrs. Lepage superciliously.

"Why shouldn't she? Her own dearest friends, in her own house!" returned Millicent.

"I shall never get used to thinking it hers. Do you not suppose it will come back to the family some day?" with a nod that indicated a secret knowledge.

"Leonard has been so very wary where young women are concerned. Though he could marry splendidly," remarked Ethel; Dell does not possess all the attributes and endowments.

"We are not in a hurry for any more marriages," said Mrs. Beaumanoir. She dreaded the comments. If Leonard would only be a little careful!

"And it would be most uncomplimentary to Lyn-dell to choose her for the sake of the home," declared Millicent, with rising color.

"Do you know," began Ethel, with an impressive air, as if this was a discovery to be mentioned with bated breath, "I am quite convinced that if she shouldn't take Leonard, or he shouldn't want her, which *is* possible, after all, she will not marry. Why, do you know of an offer——"

"One in England and one in Germany," interrupted Mrs. Beaumanoir. "And Chauncey Mason would fall at her feet if she didn't hurry out of his reach. And Spencer Kirby is very fond of her."

"Still she doesn't really 'take' in society. Of course, her being an heiress and all that is in her favor. She is fine-looking, as well. But she has a decided leaning toward strong-mindedness, and you need certain attractions to carry off that."

"If we only can keep the true state of affairs from Edith!" Mrs. Beaumanoir said confidentially to Milli-

cent later on. "I do not feel as if I could go through with the surprise and the talk."

"Dell will be sure to help us," replied Millicent. "And Mr. Murray has not really sanctioned the engagement. Under some circumstances we should feel annoyed," she smiled a little. "I think he is waiting to understand the real temper of the Beaumanoirs."

"My dear, we shall lay no straw in the way. We all want Leonard to be happy. But I *am* a little nervous lest there should be some sort of *esclandre*."

The guests came in so rapidly that the interest bid fair to be divided—cousins and second and third cousins, who could hardly be made to understand that Sherburne House would go on unchanged.

Alice and Mr. Osborne were received with the utmost delight. She had improved wonderfully, and the pretty married ways sat charmingly on her. She had also developed quite a mind of her own, and no longer stood in awe of Ethel.

Gifford's health had improved greatly. "He has grown stouter, and really very good looking," declared Alice. "Though he was quite homesick at first. I wasn't a bit, though it seems years rather than months," and the young wife gave a radiant smile. "I have seen so much, lived so much, and been so very happy."

Lyndell answered with shining eyes. Very happy! Ah, that was worth a struggle with a weak self!

"We wanted you so in the winter, Dell. Oh, why didn't you come! Tessy had a grand time in San Francisco. I think her more charming than ever. And Lady Ashton fell in love with Con; isn't it funny how naturally you call him that? He is a

splendid young fellow. He and the colonel and Bevis talked India for days. They all thought him remarkably intelligent, and so intensely amusing. Con insists that it is Irish wit. I hope you have asked him down. Bevis counts so on seeing him."

"I have invited all the family. The elders will be sure to come," replied Dell.

"They are such lovely people! I want so to see the mother. Con and Tessy talk lovingly of her, almost as if she was another child."

"As she is, *almost*," returned Dell laughingly.

The Murrays spent a night in Washington, to Leonard's satisfaction, and he accompanied them the next day. The Sherburne House carriage was in waiting, and Dell with Bonny, now sleek and fat and sedate.

"Oh, Mamma Murray!" she cried, "I was so afraid at the last moment you might change your mind."

"We wouldn't let her," said Morna. "Not but what she wanted to."

Dell held her hands in a sort of speechless ecstasy.

Tessy stood by timidly. Were they to be the same dear friends? Dell stooped to kiss Baby Densie, who looked like a cherub in her white Gretchen coat.

"I am going to take Tessy in with me," Dell said, as Leonard seemed leading her away. "Give me time to speak to everybody," raising her eyes reproachfully. "Can the rest of you go in the carriage?"

"May I come over to supper?" asked Leonard.

"If you will be attentive to cousins of every degree. I am so nearly mistress of Sherburne House that I air my authority," laughed Dell, in a pretty, consequential way.

"I promise."

She was holding Tessy's dainty hand in her firm, warm clasp.

"Then begin with Miss Morna. Mamma Murray has a knight of her own, of whom you may take lessons. Are you all comfortable? Julius, let us go in advance, as befits the princess royal. And mind, no hurrying!"

Tessy sprang in. Dell took up the reins and led Bonny in advance.

"Dell!" exclaimed the soft, entreating voice, "are you angry?"

"Angry? There is only one thing that can rouse my temper at this satisfactory period. I think if you were to ask me whether you might take Leonard's love with a clear conscience, or whether, even now, it was not possible for us to come to some understanding, I should turn into the same kind of fiend Aunt Aurelia unearthed years ago. Or you might inquire of Len the particulars of his first interview with me."

Dell gave a rather amused laugh, to hide her emotion.

"But you may have thought me deceitful, untrue to my love for you! For I think, even now, Dell, if you bade me give him up——"

"Then you do not love him as he firmly believes you do!" declared Dell spiritedly.

"I love him—so well that I wonder now how any woman can love twice. But I couldn't make any one unhappy in gaining my own desire."

Her voice was full of little breaks, and the color that fluttered over her face was love's delicious pink.

"No one will be unhappy. Someone will be very happy. I don't know how much Leonard has told you, or how much you can bear; but you ought to

begin with perfect truth. Only *he* must tell it, save the fact you knew that we were once engaged, but Uncle Beaumanoir was not quite satisfied. We were to wait a year——”

“Yes, I know all that happened. I did not for a long while, but when he wanted the matter settled he told me.”

“Ours was an affair of cousinly regard——”

“No, he wanted Sherburne House, and you wanted to give it to him. Dell, I think your regard was a hundred times finer and nobler. But I cannot see that he was so very much to blame in that other matter. Dell,” her hand reached out softly, like the flutter of a bird, and rested on her friend’s, “I know it is quite possible to love unaware. Of course Miss Garcia did not understand the regulations of girls’ lives——”

“And you love him in spite of all!”

The comment surprised even Lyndell, after it was uttered, as she looked at the lovely uplifted face.

“I loved him. Let me tell you. I shall never feel at peace until I do. He came down while we were at South Bay—once to spend Sunday, and later for a whole week, staying at a hotel in the vicinity. Mrs. Fanshawe was away for a fortnight. Oh, Dell, I was foolishly, selfishly glad! Such walks, such beautiful moonlight sails, such delicious afternoons that I swung in a hammock and he read to me. He was charming to mamma and Morna, and the children were just wild over him. He did not seem to be thinking of me, especially, and I did not think of anything but the exquisite satisfaction.”

Dell heard the soft, long breath that recalled the delicious joy.

"He came down once again on Saturday. Papa brought him. He was in New York and did not know what to do with his Sunday, so papa invited him. And then I knew and was afraid. I did not dare write to you. He came up again about Alice's wedding, after we were at home, and spoke to me. It did not seem fair and honest, and I asked him not to come any more. We had visitors—I told the truth there, but I was afraid to go, I knew I must tell you. So I begged him to forget me, and to try to love you. I knew all the relatives would be displeased. He wrote to me, and I answered twice, then I stopped. He flew up to New York and had it all out with papa, who besought me not to marry him. Mr. and Mrs. Arnold wanted so much to take me to California with them. Papa asked me to go and to try and forget. I know he was very sorry, but it seemed wisest."

"You heroic little girl!" cried Dell, in admiration and pity.

"It was so lovely out there! Just weeks and weeks of pleasure! Everybody was so good, and I *did* try to forget. I could see the force of papa's reasoning. He was too proud to have me go into any family who thought themselves higher and finer and better born, though I do not think anybody can be nobler than papa. But I had learned some things about the world and people's opinions."

"That are narrow and unjust—yes."

"And papa thought we were all such good friends. He said you had been so sweet and brave and patient, and that it would be wicked to disturb all you had gained."

That moved Dell immeasurably.

"And none of it did any good!" Dell smiled at the energetic yet pathetic protest. "Leonard would have his own way, and I couldn't unlove him. And he has been noble and sweet and brave, and when Mrs. Beaumanoir wrote such a tender, sympathetic letter to mamma, and you insisted that we should all come—there was nothing else to do. I've been very happy, and very unhappy, and life has seemed glad and desolate by turns, and now I am afraid——"

"You need not be afraid. Leonard will have his own way. You are too small and powerless to stem the tide."

"Oh, Dell! It would be such transcendent bliss just to give in to it, to have no more worry, to let one's self be loved, and oh, to love!"

"There's nothing else for you to do, my darling. It has all been planned out for you, and everybody has consented. One can't love comparative strangers in a moment, with the love you give relatives and lifelong friends. And you will be patient, I know."

"Leonard promised that nothing should be said——"

"Nothing is to be. You are simply my guest. And here we are! Thrice welcome for your own, for Leonard's sake."

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT DREAMS MAY BRING.

DELL sprang down lightly and gave her hand to Tessy. Then she turned to the carriage. Leonard was assisting Morna. Mr. Murray took little Densie in his arms, and the young man turned to Mrs. Murray.

"Welcome a thousand times!" cried Lyndell joyfully. She had Mamma Murray here at last!

"Oh, it is all so beautiful!" said Mrs. Murray, with an indrawn breath.

"You should see it a little later, in rose time. But you will come again and again. For I expect to grow old in this blessed spot."

She gave thanks that she could say so then.

Miss Sherburne and Mrs. Stanwood came forward and responded cordially to the introductions. Densie captured Aunt Julia at once.

"But your son?" inquired Miss Sherburne.

"Oh, isn't it queer!" exclaimed Dell. "I've never thought of Con! Why, he promised——"

"He is coming down with Dr. Carew."

Mr. Murray glanced at his wife as he said this, and a frightened expression crossed her face.

Dell intercepted it and was transfixed.

Leonard led Tessy up to Aunt Sherburne. His entreating face would have softened a harder heart, if the heart was full of love for him. He put the trembling little hand in hers.

Miss Sherburne stooped and kissed her, and Tessy knew she had been received into grace. She glanced up with a face so full of delight that the elder woman was moved immeasurably. Was it not a blessed thing to make this young soul happy in the very beginning of life?

There was a pleasant confusion, and to Mrs. Murray the wide hall seemed full. She was so glad to shelter herself in her tall, composed husband, who was as much at home as if he were a daily visitor.

"I will take Tessy and Morna," said Dell eagerly, as Mrs. Stanwood led the elders up the broad staircase, and they followed.

"You two are to have my room, and I have taken this little one to be near you. And Philly will wait upon you. But it is so strange I had forgotten Con."

Tessy showed the same curious alarm—was it really that? Then her self-possession was gravity.

"You are sure Con is well? Oh, is he going off at a moment's notice?"

"Nothing is the matter with Con. Dr. Carew wanted him to wait, that is all."

There was something in Morna's tone that puzzled Dell. But she stood up straight and assured, as if that must be the end of the questioning.

"I wonder if you would like anything? City people proffer a cup of tea."

"I do not spoil my complexion with tea," laughed Morna. "But it will feel more human when the dust of ages is washed off it. Oh, Dell! what a lovely big room! I wish I had a cat to swing in it, the space is so utterly delightful."

With that she pirouetted around in the most graceful fashion. Tessy sat in speechless enjoyment. To

belong to these people, to have a right here, to be Dell's own cousin!

"Do either of you think you will stay?" remarked Dell mischievously. "Here is Philly to take your hats. And where has the trunk gone?"

"Oh, to mamma's room! Where is that? Dell, whatever do you do in this great house. It is like a hotel. Where is mamma's room!"

"Just across the hall. Come and see."

Julius was bringing up the trunk. There was a pretty little crib for Densie, that Floyd had outgrown.

"Oh, mamma, are you lost?" cried Morna. "Just imagine a little mite like Tess meandering about this great house. And the immense out-of-doors! Papa, will you unstrap the trunk? We must have some of our very own belongings to look at, to tell who we are."

Dell had gone back to Tessy, who stood by the window. Someone was talking to Leonard in the path below. And he had given up every hope of this splendid old home for her! Perhaps in time Dell might have come to love him if he had been very, very much in earnest.

"Tessy, what is wrong with Dr. Carew?"

The question was asked with such sudden incisiveness that Tessy turned pale and hesitated.

"Yes, something has happened. And—I wanted him to come. Why, I shall feel hurt——"

"He will. They will come through to-night."

"But I must know." She caught Tessy's arm. "Was it an accident?"

"Oh, no! Dell, we were not to speak of it. He meant to come with us, but he wasn't quite strong enough; and they wanted him to wait, insisted upon it."

“Then he *has* been ill, or some dreadful thing——”

“You’ll go and conjure up all sorts of horrible imaginings. Oh, please don’t! And don’t breathe it to anyone. He has been working very hard. And you know he scarcely took any rest last summer. There was a very long and critical operation, and he did splendidly. One of the surgeons they had depended upon was taken suddenly ill, and no one else had studied up the case, except the two. And after it was over Dr. Carew fainted away, and was unconscious so long they were alarmed at first. But it is all right now, only they wanted him to wait a day or two before he took so long a journey. There, you have wrung it all out of me!” declared Tessy, with a pretty show of indignation. “If I didn’t know you were as safe as—as the bottom of the ocean! But please don’t let anyone know. You are so sharp at guessing.”

Dell kissed her. Morna came back, Philly following with her arms full of different articles.

“You look like a lady of state,” Lyndell laughed, to cover the awkwardness. “And now I must go and attend to someone else.”

But she paused at the end of the hall and thought of Bertram. He had always been so strong. To faint away, to be unconscious! A shiver ran over her.

No one else came that afternoon. Dell took her guests down to the great drawing room, where most of the others had gathered, and introduced them. Miss Carrick greeted Tessy with unfeigned pleasure, and was rather amazed at tall, pretty Morna. But the dainty little mother was so like Tessy she felt in five minutes as if she had known her half her life. She

had not been as lovely as Tessy in her young days, but even then there was a charm hard to define; the graciousness of a sweet soul that never knew a narrow or grudging thought. And now at three-and-forty, with her hair fine and soft and hardly a silver thread in it, the plump clear skin very little wrinkled and still fair and pink as a girl's; she looked a refined little body in her gray checked silk with its black lace garniture. They had persuaded her to wear one small diamond beside her wedding ring, and there was another in the pin at her throat. There was no fussy consciousness, even if she was a little timid. It was not because these were grand people,—she saw rich folk every day of her life,—but because they were Dell's people, and she couldn't quite forget that first interview with Miss Sherburne, who now came over and talked to her while little Densie made a pretty picture hanging about her knees. But in her sweet forgiveness she would not have recalled it for worlds.

Leonard had Morna by the piano, and tried very hard to keep his eyes from Tessy in her heliotrope colored gown that heightened her peculiar twilight effects. Mr. Murray stood by the great carved chimneypiece, talking with some of the cousins from Baltimore.

Leonard was taking it all in with a feeling of elation. He could hardly have loved a woman if he had to be ashamed of her people. The Murrays might have been the finest blood in the county, if you judged by the reposeful self-possession. And when Aunt Julia's little boys came in they coaxed shy Densie away from her mother—she was so used to boys, and they had little bits of by-play that made Aunt Julia almost covet her.

After supper, which was rather early, Mr. and Mrs. Beaumanoir drove over, and the two mothers, who were some day to join hands in a nearer tie, met with a little bit of embarrassment. Leonard introduced them. Tessy had run away with the little children, and was telling them a wonderful story. The night was so mild they sat out on the porch and fell into a bit of confidence that banished the awkwardness.

"She is certainly a very quaint, charming body," Mrs. Beaumanoir said to Millicent. "If Leonard's wife can look as girlishly pretty when she has been married three-and-twenty years and cared for a household of children, we shall all be content."

"Where were you?" Leonard asked of Tessy, way-laying her in the hall. "My mother has been here."

"I was helping put the children to bed. And Densie was in a strange place, you know. Besides, you were not——"

"But I can steal one moment of love, surely! And when all this crowd gets away the engagement shall be regularly announced. I am not going to be put off on quarter rations."

"Oh, Leonard! please——"

It was so sweet to be entreated in that tone, by a small mite who couldn't escape his strong arms nor his lover's kisses.

They all retired at a rather old-fashioned hour, for the guests were fatigued with their journey, and Miss Sherburne had had more excitement than was really good for her. The next day would be very full also.

But Lyndell was not thinking of her birthday as she lay strangely wakeful. She would have been more than human if she had not enjoyed the attentions paid to the Murrays. And the highest gratification was

that they were so entirely worthy of it. Circumstances and a certain natural breadth, perhaps the liberty with them had made her extremely democratic; but there was a charm in fine breeding. It was like a special Providence and reward that prosperity should have attended Mr. Murray's every step. The prosperity of honesty, industry, and good judgment, not any wild speculations or unfair practices. Yes, she was as proud of his record as if she had been his daughter.

Was all this an effort to keep Bertram Carew out of her mind? She could not endure the thought of his being ill, suffering. Her sympathy seemed to sweep her away to some unknown shore, that she strove against with all her might. She must not hug any secret knowledge to her soul that belonged to Millicent. She must not let Tessy Murray outdo her in that high honor of womanhood. The pattern had been set so forcibly before her.

The morning dawned radiantly. There was a cordial stir everywhere. Lyndell thought she would like to keep the old house always full of people; she was very fond of her kind. Tessy and Morna were eager with congratulations, and they had the first, the sweetest.

But she went to Miss Aurelia's room directly afterward. She would not set the Murrays before her.

She came out with tears shining in her eyes. Mrs. Murray stood in the hall, holding Densie by the hand. She put her arms around the young girl's neck and kissed her.

"My dear," she said simply, "I don't think we ever quite knew how glad we were to have had you, to keep you still. And when Tessy goes away, for

her lover's that impatient he will not be put off, we shall look to you for bits of comfort. Dell, dear, it's hard to have them go out of the home nest. And I had a fancy Tessy would stay. She's never been caring for lovers. But now we can't say no."

She looked so sweet and piteous, almost as if imploring help from the tall young girl.

"And it came to me last evening," she smiled now through some tears, "about that afternoon so long ago—do you mind, Dell? But your aunt has softened and become rarely sweet, and everything has changed so much. We've grown out of the old things into the new, and it's like a bit of heaven to be here and see you happy."

There were other guests going downstairs, and they joined the little throng. Mr. Murray and Leonard stood on the porch—they had been talking a long while. And then Lyndell was suddenly merged into the heroine of the occasion, and everybody wished her as much joy and happiness "as if it had been her wedding day," Morna declared. And all the servants wanted to speak to young "missus," and many of them brought little gifts that touched her to the heart. She wondered with a sense of amusement if they would begin to call Aunt Aurelia "old mis'," as she had heard in Southern houses, and resolved that it should never be done.

Mr. Whittingham came over with his small family, and he and Uncle Beaumanoir and Spencer held a lengthy conference with Aunt Aurelia and Lyndell.

"I wish I didn't have to know anything about it," the young girl said rather petulantly. "Can you not go on and do everything just the same?"

"Not quite the same. If you want us to manage

as before, we must have new power as trustees. I am getting to be quite an old man, but Spencer here keeps track of everything. And now you can demand your money." He gave a dry little laugh.

"I coaxed some out of you once," she said, with a gay smile. "And put it to a bad use."

"Not so bad, either," shaking his head. "My dear young lady, being your guardian has afforded me a great deal of interest and pleasure. And I shall be glad to remain your friend and trustee."

Then she had to listen to all the lists of properties and their incomes, which year by year were growing more profitable. One young girl to have all this money and Sherburne House! She was amazed, almost crushed by the weight of honors. And there was no one who really needed it in the immediate family.

She had spoken before this of Gifford and his debt, which she wanted canceled.

"My dear," said her uncle, "if Leonard had borrowed money of you, I should want him to repay it. The discipline will be a good thing for Gifford. A man ought to consider a woman's money just as sacred as a man's; and his promise to her should be kept under all circumstances."

So she could not proffer again.

There were works of benevolence. Some she had proposed were considered rather ill-judged. There were such close limitations. She understood, with her ready comprehension, that she must go slow at Sherburne. No sweeping changes could be made, and she was not certain now that they would be best.

When she went back there had been fresh accessions of guests. All the Beaumanoir household, and her

two cousins, and some people from the neighborhood. Major Stanwood drove over for Archie and several friends.

"The Carews have not come up yet, I see," said Millicent. "Bertram thought he might reach here last night. And young Murray. Oh, Lyndell! they were all charmed with Mrs. Murray. Leonard's way is clear now. I must find Tessy and give her my welcome."

Just as she was turning Major Stanwood drove up with his son, and there was a cordial greeting.

"Young Carew came on the train. Did any of you know that he was ill?"

"Ill!" Millicent paled suddenly. Dell was fore-armed. With presence of mind she said:

"How long has he been ill?"

"I don't know. He looks quite worn out. That is the way with so many of the young fellows—trying to do it all! But the doctor and Miss Neale will soon have him nursed up. And he bade me tell you he was not going to miss the dinner."

"Oh!" said Dell, relieved. But she had the other certainty, if she had needed it.

"How curious!" began Millicent. "I heard a week ago. And now I remember he spoke of going abroad. He has been working hard, in connection with some of the other surgeons, to establish several new methods. And he is in so many things. He needs someone to look after him. I think he has missed the charm of the Murray household this winter. Dell, there must be some unusual gift or grace in Tessy——"

They were all in a huddle and Millicent paused, she was so used to having Dell alone for an audience.

Certainly the young girl carried her honors gracefully; and when she glanced at timid, retiring Tessy Murray and her distinguished-looking brother, she was not quite satisfied with the turn of fate. Still she drew near and placed her arm tenderly over Tessy's shoulder. The soft eyes looked up pleadingly.

She stooped a little and kissed her. "I hope you will be very happy," she whispered.

The dinner was to be at three. The savory fragrances from the kitchen seemed to pervade the whole place. There had been a light luncheon on the buffet for any newcomer from a distance, and the children had been carefully looked after. They ran about in the most gleeful fashion, and hovered around little Densie as only boys can when there is but one attraction.

"The Murrays seem to be very decentish sort of people," Mrs. Longworth said patronizingly, "but that tall girl is a thoroughpaced coquette. I suppose now Dell will make it a sort of second home to them all here."

Alice laughed. "Their own home is a very lovely one."

"Yes, on certain lines. Mamma was surprised at the evidences of respectability. Mrs. Fanshawe has had them all in training——"

Mr. Longworth was coming up with Mr. Murray, and Leonard had Mrs. Murray on his arm.

"Another of Miss Sherburne's cousins," he said with a bright smile, introducing her.

"I must thank you for all your kindness to my daughter last winter," Mrs. Murray began, after she had acknowledged the acquaintance. "She came home quite in love with everybody."

The manner was certainly charming, and defied criticism.

Ethel inclined her head an instant afterward and whispered:

"I hope the 'in love' didn't extend to Gifford."

"We were very sorry to have her go," said Mrs. Osborne. "And your son, is he not here to grace my cousin's birthday?"

"He is to come with Dr. Carew."

"Len," Ethel began pointedly, "are we to congratulate *you* about anything? You know one of our dreams, all through the family, has been to see you the master of Sherburne House."

In spite of himself Leonard's color deepened. A faint pink went up in Mrs. Murray's face, but she made no other movement.

"You are not to do it at this juncture," he said quietly, and turned away.

"Oh, Ethel! how could you?" cried Alice, shocked.

"I think Len wants spurring up. It was a suggestion for Mrs. Murray to look out for her very pronounced young daughter."

Millicent had gone upstairs when the Carew carriage arrived. Con Murray and Miss Neale came up together, and Dell, standing there, greeted them warmly.

"I think now you are Sherburne from top to toe," cried Con, looking her over. "I am almost afraid of you. Oh, dear, dear Dell!"

He was fain to kiss her before them all. Had he ever played "tag" and sidewalk "hopscotch," and oh! as on that merriest, saddest of all afternoons, "circus"? Had he ever written that dreadful letter about the tall, gracious, elderly woman who put out her hand to him also, and said softly:

“I am glad you think her a Sherburne.”

The doctor and Bertram were coming up the steps. He looked wistfully at Dell, and she hurried to meet him.

“Oh, you were very, very ill!” Something shadowed her face like a passing drift over the sun.

“A little upset. But I meant to come to do honor to the feast.” He took both her hands, but his were dry and feverish. “Is it all fair sailing? How can Len ever be grateful enough?”

Just this moment—just this long, inexplicable look from eyes to eyes. And then Dell Sherburne put the consciousness away with sunny bravery, for Millicent was hurrying out, and there seemed a touch of charming confusion.

At this juncture dinner was announced. Leonard was master of ceremonies. Aunt Aurelia was in her old place at the head of the table, Mr. and Mrs. Beaumanoir at the foot. At the right the Murrays, at his left Mr. Whittingham, while friends and relatives were interspersed; the middle spaces of both sides being devoted to the young people. Leonard had Dell on one side and Tessy on the other, and looked supremely radiant.

It certainly was an enjoyable occasion, and the feasting was quite magnificent. When the dinner and dessert were over and the coffee brought in, Mr. Whittingham made the speech of the occasion, very heartfelt and cordial. Then they toasted the young heiress; there were other bright speeches made, young Mr. Murray and Mr. Osborne quite distinguishing themselves. Leonard replied as Miss Sherburne’s vicergerent.

When they left the dining room there was a sound

of music, and all the lawn was alight with colored lanterns. Many of the elder guests took their departure. There was to be a dance presently, but now the young people sauntered about.

Con carried off Dell.

"I never was so amazed in my life!" he began. "And I am thinking of the grand *coup* there will be when Leonard Beaumanoir's engagement is announced. I don't understand it at all. Dell——"

"It is a clear case of falling in love. And a great deal of love is a tremendous surprise to everybody."

"Since the general impression is that he was your devoted knight. I always supposed that would be the end of it. He doesn't look much like the poor, helpless fellow who lay in a reclining chair—how long ago is it?—four years or so. And you have been here almost eight years. Well, we couldn't any of us have guessed what was going to happen. Talk about romances; we are living them right along! Doesn't everybody think Len awfully short-sighted?"

Dell flushed under the glance of admiration.

"No one really knows it yet, except the two families."

"Did they take it hard—truly now?"

He caught both hands. She laughed nervously.

"They are nice, fine people, but my father stands comparison very well. And I like Beaumanoir, now that he has divested himself from some of the old, narrow ideas. I think I have seen a good deal of vulgarity and boorishness sailing under what is called good birth. It may be long descent, but there is nothing good or noble about it. Only I *do* have to laugh when I think how summarily we were set aside."

He laughed now gayly, cheerfully, with no thought of wounded pride.

"Of course no one really knew," Dell began, in a softened tone.

"That they were entertaining angels unaware—no! But how Tessy caught the fancy of that big, handsome, aristocratic chap! I keep saying to myself:

" 'It's a very fine thing to be brother-in-law
To a very magnificent three-tailed bashaw.' "

"Tessy is lovely. She just suits him. She finds her way to everybody's heart."

"She won't be able to hold a candle to Morna a year or two hence."

"I think he fell in love with your mother. For all his queer, contradictory characteristics he is very domestic at heart. And Uncle Beaumanoir is one of the most delightful of men."

"Talking about young men, where can you match Dr. Carew? He knows so much he tires me out; that is his only fault."

"He was very ill! What caused the fainting?"

"How did you know?" in surprise.

"I dragged it out of Tessy. I knew there was something wrong, and I made her tell. You shall not blame her!"

"Dear little Tess! She was all sympathy. She's like mamma there. But Bertram didn't want his father to know the worst. You see, he'd been filling up every moment—writing, lecturing to classes, and he so young, too! But he's a born physician. He had been writing all the night before; he had hardly taken any sleep for a week. How his hand and nerves were steady enough to hold a man's life between his fingers—

but he did it when some of the faculty said it couldn't be done. I suppose it was the determination. But the next ten hours were quite terrible for him. He sent for me—I don't know just why, unless he wanted to draw upon my superabundant vitality."

Con looked as if he might have a good deal to spare. There was strength in every line.

"And he was bound to come down here. We had a compartment, and it was very comfortable traveling. He bottled up every ounce of strength for to-day. It is just a case of exhaustion. He's sound as a nut. Only he thought he was made of steel, and he is flesh and blood, like the rest of us."

"I should have been sorry to miss him. My cousin Violet is abroad, Harry Lepage in the navy, and Gifford at the West; with these exceptions the people nearest and dearest to me are all here."

"He wouldn't have missed it for a fortune. He said so. And if you had seen his patience!"

The words filled her with a great gladness. Someone was calling.

"Oh, we must go back! I am"—she laughed with a touch of consciousness—"The star of the goodly companie.'"

It was Alice. "They want to dance," she said. "Len is hunting for you."

He came up right behind. Con walked beside Mrs. Osborne.

"Tess is an angel!" Leonard declared. "Nine people out of every ten have *us* engaged. I feel queer about it, as if it wasn't fair to you. And she sits and smiles. To-morrow I shall be all day mending her sweet, broken heart. And now I must redeem my reputation for a long-ago rudeness. Miss Sherburne,

will you allow me the pleasure of leading the evening's entertainment with you, in the opening quadrille?"

Tessy had a partner. Carew seemed comfortable in an easy-chair, with Millicent to entertain him. How lovely Milly looked to-night in her soft pearl gray gown, with ribbons a shade deeper.

After that they had quite a revel indoors and out. The gayety was infectious. It was another good time at Sherburne House.

Dr. Carew hovered about his son. Miss Neale was anxious to have him return home, as she noted his pale face, but his eyes had a bright, longing look.

Yes, Lyndell Sherburne was very happy. He watched her bright smile, he caught the sound of her inspiriting voice now and then. It was clear yet not loud, it had some peculiar rhythm, as if it had been trained to music. He wondered how she would read Shelley's "Lark," soaring up to heaven's gates.

How light her step was! Her very dancing was a pleasure to see. And yet she was not all mirth and gayety; she had longing, aspiring moments. No one had quite fathomed the richness of her nature, not even Millicent. His father had come the nearest.

She was in a little circle now, having some merry badinage with Con Murray. The others were laughing at the bright play of wits. Con was a very attractive, unsentimental, undeveloped fellow. And she had known him so long!

Bertram half rose. "I think I *will* go home, Aunt Neale, dear. I have done my full duty toward the heiress. Millicent, it was lovely of you to devote your evening to me. There comes father!"

CHAPTER XXI.

LORD OF HERSELF.

THE mistress of Sherburne House! It came into Lyndell's mind the first thing the next morning. Not in any prideful sense, but a kind of humility that seemed quite new to her.

For she had fallen short of her ideals in many things, mostly with her own soul. She had busied herself with the mysteries of the future, with the deep questions of life, with high aspirations, and secretly fretted at the narrow round. God had not made it narrow; she was doing that herself, because the one thing she believed would make it blessed and comprehensive was out of her reach. She had promised herself that she would not covet it, and yet, in every opportunity that offered, she had allowed herself to feel miserable that so great a joy had not come to her, but must go to one who had so much already.

It was midnight, and past, before the lights had been out in the house. Everybody, even some of the servants, slept late. But Dell lay and listened to the singing of the birds until every pulse thrilled within her, and she rose softly. Morna and Tessy were lying there in serenest comfort. Aunt Aurelia always had a cup of coffee brought up to her room, and never came down until the breakfast bell rang. Aunt Julia was in the farther wing of the house, and was generally busy getting the boys ready for school, but they were to keep holiday to-day.

Some of the relatives had gone over to Beaumanoir to finish their visit. Mr. Longworth and Ethel had taken the evening train. Mrs. Longworth felt that she had added glory enough to her cousin's coming of age.

"It is a handsome old estate," her husband said, "but its real money value is not so great. The land can only be hired to the negroes, or kept for early vegetables and fruit, neither of which are especially remunerative. But your great grandfather was shrewd in buying in that western district. That will be an ever increasing source of income. Really, your cousin will be quite a prize. I suppose Beaumanoir will get her, though he didn't strike me as being enthusiastically lover-like."

"It's such an old agreement," and Ethel gave her shoulders a rather supercilious movement. "There really was nothing else to do."

"She must have been very tractable about it. She doesn't look like that kind of girl, either."

"I am sure any girl might be proud of Leonard."

"True enough! But Miss Sherburne might take her pick among marriageable men. She has a certain fine dignity, with all her youthfulness."

"She has had the best of training, but those years with the Murrays have left their impress on her."

"Mr. Murray is a very intelligent man, with a good business head. And our boasted equality does succeed now and then in bringing some of the best to the front. That is its redeeming feature."

Ethel was silent. She thought the Murrays had been pushed forward altogether too much. But they were better bred than some people she had been compelled to recognize in Washington.

And now, as Dell glided softly downstairs, drawing long, delicious breaths of springtide air, she saw Mr. Murray and one of the most exclusive Floyd relatives from Baltimore strolling along in genial converse.

"He looks like some of the old Norsemen," Dell thought, with his clear skin and fine color, the white in his hair giving it a kind of flaxen tint. She couldn't recall anyone who had taken the family amiss except Aunt Lepage and Ethel.

Joe and "Klumpus," as the young lad, who was named after his country's discoverer, was always called, were gathering up the *débris* of burned out lanterns and trailing wreaths of moss and princess pine, with the withered flowers that had been festooned from tree to tree. The sun was making long eastern shadows—how many times she had watched them—as messengers from some wonderful country, bringing glad tidings. The air was so sweet and full of melody that her heart was stirred within her.

"I have resolved a great many times to live up to my heritage, and there have been so many failures. One takes a heritage with all that belongs to it, the joys, the experiences, and the sacrifices, if there are any," she thought.

Did not most lives come to know some hope or desire dropped out of them? She had disappointed everybody about Leonard, but they were accepting it cheerfully. And her own father had disappointed them all dreadfully, but they had come back to the old love, and held his memory in sweet remembrance.

She knew she had never quite relinquished her dream until last night; Alice's experience had given her a vague hope. But she thought of Bertram, pale and languid, and Millicent's beautiful face smiling

serenely, making a blessed atmosphere about him. And in that moment she accepted the double friendship, and resolved to let it make her own life glad. Had the larger, diviner work begun within her? She felt so, with a great, earnest thanksgiving.

The gentlemen sauntered up to the porch and bade her good-morning, with new and heartfelt wishes for the future. Then Mr. Floyd went within.

"My dear child," began Mr. Murray, with deep feeling, "I think the old love and care has been repaid fourfold. I must thank you for the lovely visit and the cordial welcome. Oh, Dell! can you remember that summer morning long ago, just after Miss Sherburne had been——"

"When I was going to run away!" she interrupted. "And the talk under the old apple tree? Oh, Papa Murray, you said only a coward skulked along behind fences, and that God had answered my mamma's prayer and given me something hard to do, to make me a brave soldier. I couldn't have been so brave but for your love."

"We have all had our reward—even to Miss Aurelia's favor. When I thought of trusting my other darling to her——" His voice trembled with emotion.

"But she loved her long before——"

"Leonard is her favorite nephew. I truly hoped, Dell, the plans would come out as she desired, and I could *not* bring myself to consent at first, though he is such a fine, ambitious, and handsome young fellow. Any father might be proud of him for a son. Still I can't quite understand Tessy loving him so dearly; not but what she would have given him up if everyone had thought best. I talked it over yesterday with Miss

Sherburne—that and some other matters—and we touched the foundation stone of good will. I haven't any fear now. Only—it seems so strange to have *my* child here among you all——”

There was no exultation in his tone. It truly did not seem a great step to him, or that there should be any condescension on the other side. It was simply strange to him. His children were the best of his life. He could not sign away anything better.

“We didn't think it then?” Dell smiled, with tears in her eyes. The exultation was love, not pride.

“If I could have moved God's choice for her, it would have been Dr. Carew,” he said simply.

Was everybody so won by Bertram?

“And they were such friends! But love is quite another thing,” and a humorous tenderness crossed his fatherly face.

“They will all come to love her. Oh, you need not fear!” she entreated.

“Not while she has Miss Sherburne on her side. Dell, dear, there is nothing left to wish for you. You have won about all by your grace and endeavor.”

“God has given it to me. I sometimes feel that I have made very little advance. I don't come up to my own ideal,” in a passionate, regretful tone.

“Do you expect to know it all at twenty? My child, I go on learning every day. I take steps backward that were wrong and forward again, remembering that God only can pick out the straight purpose in the criss-cross lines. I think it must puzzle his wisdom sometimes. And he is so patient with our blunders. He gives us so many chances. And that's one reason why I like Dr. Carew so much. With all the new learning and strange jargon they talk, he still

calls the great moving and inspiring power God. And oh, my dear!" with sudden reverent earnestness, "I hope all your life may be according to this beginning."

He kissed her on the broad, fair forehead.

There was a pleasant confusion of voices within. Tessy came flying down, and the others behind her. Mr. Murray took his "baby" in his arms. Big girl as she was, they could not let her slip out of the place.

It made a lovely domestic picture, Leonard Beaumanoir thought, as he came trotting up the avenue on Duke. And Lyndell might have been one of the children, but for her brown eyes.

It was a very busy morning. One after another went away, with the kindest wishes for Dell and expressions of pleasure at their visit.

Archie's farewell was the most dolorous.

"I don't feel as if I had seen a bit of you," he declared impatiently to Dell. "But I shall be through this summer, and father is to bring you up to the grand ball. I shall be proud enough of you, Miss Sherburne!"

Dell laughed pleasantly. "We shall count on a visit, surely," she replied.

Aunt Lepage was to take Florence back to school, and Fanny went part of the way with her, after exacting a promise from Dell that she would certainly come to her graduation.

"Why, I begin to feel quite old," said Dell, with sudden mirthfulness. "I graduated so long ago."

Alice and Mr. Osborne came over to dinner; the rest of the family sent word they would be at supper.

If Leonard was devoted yesterday to his cousin, he had no eyes or thoughts for anyone but Tessy to-day. She was so shyly sweet and startled, as if she had lost

her way a little and would fain escape to the background.

But for his skirmishing with Morna, there would have been no cover at all.

"Oh, Len!" exclaimed Dell, when they had come out on the porch, for the day was as charming as yesterday; "will you not go over to Dr. Carew's? No one has expressed any anxiety all the morning."

"We have been so much engrossed," said Aunt Julia. "Yes, we want to hear. He looked wretched last evening. What has he been doing?"

"Overwork, overwork!" cried Leonard, with a musical mirthfulness. "You see, I do not take it so hard. I am anxious for a long life and prosperity. Oh, I dare say Con is over there! He went to the station with one relay. Sherburne House had another splendid time, didn't it? Yes, Dell, I'll go if you'll let me have the phaeton and Miss Murray."

Tessy declined at first. Then she found she was becoming the center of observation, and quietly rose to get her hat, obeying Leonard's entreating look.

"It is queer," began Alice, in a low tone to Dell, "but yesterday everybody took it for granted that you and Leonard—and he has acted all the morning as if he was dead in love with Tessy!"

Lyndell flushed. "For protection to myself the engagement is to be announced this evening."

"Oh, Dell!"

Alice was an exclamation point of surprise.

"Tessy is sweet and lovely, and I have felt this long while that you—that you did not know—oh, Dell! you *don't* really understand what love is. But I can't imagine Leonard——"

"It must be a great surprise to everybody." Dell

smiled at the puzzled expression. "But he fell in love with her a year ago and wavered a little. Since the autumn his mind has been unalterably fixed. The family were opposed and took the opportunity of sending Tessy away."

"Opposed—why?" Alice's family pride was wounded.

"If you consider a moment, you will understand," Dell returned gravely.

"But we all liked Tessy so! And Dell, Mr. Murray is the equal of anyone here. He is finer and more gentlemanly than many of the men you meet who have always been rich. Only it *does* seem funny for Len to choose that way. And he couldn't have found a sweeter wife. They were all in love with her at Belmont. Why, she could have married——"

"Tessy has had no lack of admirers," said Dell, rather proudly. Then she felt the color rising to her cheeks as she wondered if anyone would really believe she had been thrown over for Tessy! An instant later she was struggling against the sense of mortification. Yet Tessy knew that Leonard had been more than half in love with her, and quite exigent for an unqualified acceptance. Was it bravery or love?

The children played about, and Mrs. Murray looked on smilingly. She had won Aunt Julia by her wealth of mother love. Mrs. Stanwood could read the secret of Dell's adoration, and her heart ached over again for the little girl who had come from that warm, loving, and outgiving home to the unwelcomeness and biting, protesting air of Sherburne House. She was convinced that Leonard had chosen for his happiness.

Alice was silent a long while. Then she said:

"Tessy will be quite able to hold her own with

society. She never bristles up, but I have seen her look a time or two as if she was surrounded by fine spear points that would keep anyone at bay. And she has a curious sort of firmness. I don't believe Len will ever walk over her, and his chief fault *is* lordliness. Well, I *am* amazed, but it is one of the things where the fitness grows upon you. Tessy is sweet as a rose."

Dell gave her a bright smile, and the lustrous tenderness of her eyes, for the praise that was so grateful to her.

Morna was indoors playing. She was a really brilliant performer, and had a dainty, saucy voice for singing. Aunt Aurelia came down and listened. They all chatted pleasantly, and by and by the Beaumanoir carriage came over. Millicent was with her parents.

"Have you heard from the Carews to-day?" asked Aunt Julia.

"Oh, yes! I was over this morning," replied Millicent. "Bert is very much tired out, but none the worse for the dissipation, he thinks, though he would have come if it had really laid him up, he declares," smiling over to Dell. "He was fairly obstinate about it."

"Is it just being worn out? He always seemed so strong. He has never been really ill."

"It is being worn out a good deal. He had made up his mind to go abroad in May or June for a three months' rest, and he found so many things to finish up. But he has decided to go now as soon as he can, and has been trying to coax his father and Aunt Neale to accompany him."

"That would be splendid! The doctor ought to

go," exclaimed Dell. "But it sometimes seems as if Miss Neale had seen all the richness of the earth."

"I don't believe he will be able to persuade either of them. I am sorry, too."

"He is not in bed?"

"Oh, no; pillowed on that great sofa where he can watch the goings out and the comings in," laughed Millicent. "And Aunt Neale hovers about him with the most delightful solicitude. He said he meant to press everyone into service for his entertainment."

She sat down beside Dell presently and asked about Tessy and Leonard.

"Bert was wondering someone had not been from Sherburne House," she rejoined to Dell's explanation.

It was quite supper time when the lovers returned. They had left Con at the doctor's and gone for a drive—the first time Leonard "had had her to himself," he said complainingly. And she was such a pretty picture with her dewy eyes full of untold meanings and her sweet, blushing face.

She would have run away and hidden herself. Her joy seemed so sacred, so secret, too, as if she could not bear other eyes to look upon it. But Leonard had tight hold of her hand.

"Father, mother," he said, in a joyful tone; "this is the one woman I have chosen out of all the world to be my wife. I hope you will all love her and give her a warm welcome."

Mrs. Murray could have kissed him on the spot. She had no further fears for her child.

But it was Tessy who had the kisses. Leonard could not have done a more manly or beautiful act than his frank and tender declaration.

The supper bell rang the second time, long and loud; they had been so engrossed.

"Let me go a minute!" Tessy pleaded, hat in hand. "No, don't come, Morna!"

"The one he had chosen out of all the world!"

Lyndell Sherburne looked at her cousin's beaming, brilliant, satisfied face. Had he really ever loved her! There was an inexplicable disquietude. Would anyone ever carry a joy like that in his face for her?

He waited a little in the wide doorway and led Tessy to the seat beside himself. If yesterday was Dell's honoring, to-night was hers: set there in the midst of them, the chief thing, because the chief one among all had loved her. There could be no coldness, no distance in the time to come.

During the evening the Murrays spoke of returning. Con did not come in until quite late.

"I haven't had half a visit," he declared. "I am trying my utmost to supplant Miss Dell. I shouldn't wonder if I persuaded the doctor and that lovely Miss Neale to adopt me. Mater, it would be hard to lose your son when you love him so dearly for the dangers he has passed; but his virtues are of that transcendent quality they cannot be hidden. I have promised a few more days to *my* Dr. Carew."

"Oh," said Mrs. Beaumanoir, "we cannot let you go so soon. You have not tested our hospitality yet. We shall insist upon that pleasure to-morrow."

Con took his father's arm. "After all, a day or two cannot matter," he said.

The household returned to Beaumanoir with this understanding. Leonard was fain to remain, but firm-willed little Tessy exercised her authority, and the big fellow acquiesced reluctantly.

"Now," said Morna, as they were about to retire, "Tess shall have you to-night, Lyndell. I know she is just crazy to talk over everything. I want to save my impressions fresh for my own engagement."

Dell laughed. Tessy looked wistful, and that settled it.

Yet for a while they said nothing. Each was needlessly busy with the pretty girlish fussiness belonging to such a time, when trinkets are carefully laid by, and laces patted and folded, and sleeves straightened out. It was still strange to Dell. Anita Garcia had been so different, so communicative at once. And Tessy heretofore had been so ready to talk. But Dell had always lacked the grace of going forward in a frank, sweet manner when she was not quite at ease.

Tessy came to her, put both soft white arms up about her neck. The voice was very low, with a little fear in the breathlessness.

"Are you quite satisfied to have it so, dear?"

"Oh, you foolish Tessy!" There was a tremble in the voice.

"When he said 'the one woman in all the world' I knew he had chosen you first. He was telling me about all that year abroad. I don't know how you could have helped loving him. If you had, then it would have been you."

"Tessy, you are very generous. Some girls would think——"

"They would think they could not be second," Tessy said quietly in the long pause. "Dell, two men have asked me in marriage that I liked a good deal. Presently they will find someone to return the affection, and they will love absorbingly. I hope they never will remember me the least bit, not enough to

confess they have been in love. But it is different with Leonard. He will never cease to love you. Do you suppose I felt troubled yesterday because he was your knight, and people were suggesting a marriage! I was glad to have him so lovely of his own accord. I should have been hurt if he had come to me for any word. I am glad to have him do right. I should feel mortified to have him do mean, selfish little things."

"But he loves himself a good deal," interposed Dell. "And he loves to be waited on, to have people give continually, to be the center of everything."

"And I love to give, not simply for what I may get back, but for the sake of loving, of going quite out of myself for the other one. I should want to be respected in it," with a sudden straightening of the small figure that bespoke firmness, "but I want someone to be first, like papa, someone brave and strong, that you know would fight for you in a minute. And I love Leonard for all the human little things about him; he has tempers, and a very obstinate will sometimes. And that was what helped him through the winter. I said I loved him, but that he must have a clear conscience about you—that no one must feel aggrieved."

"And you wanted him to ask me again to marry him. What if I had?" with a daring smile.

"Then I should have known it was the right thing, and rejoiced with you. And I wanted to be sure no one would be angry. I am very glad everybody loves him well enough to bear a little disappointment. And when I make him very happy in the years to come, as I shall, they will all think this the best that could have happened to him."

"Better than Sherburne House?" tentatively.

"Yes, better than any person's fortune. He will have to make one for himself, and for me. I shall want him to. I shall want him to come up to the best that is in him, and there is a good deal. I shall want him to keep to his people and honor his father and mother, just as I shall always honor mine. All these things will sustain my pride in him. But if anything happened—if he lost his health, or if he failed honorably in making the fortune—I should want to love him better to make up for the sting of disappointment."

"Oh, my dear! You are twice worthy of him, too worthy"—too good, she wanted to say, but could anyone be too good, too loving? What was the new commandment for?

Tessy laughed softly, with love's own rapture.

"But you will not mind if I love him very much?"

"Oh, Tess! I am not such a dog in the manger! And you will make him a hundred times happier than I ever should. If it had not been that one man did love me very much once, I should say I was not the kind to attract men in that manner. And oh! he is happily married now, as is much better for him. It would have been a big mistake!"

Lyndell laughed pleasantly.

"There are some splendid men in the world——"

Tessy paused and looked up at her archly.

"Then you do not think you have taken the last one, the only one? My dear little Tessy, I want you to be very happy. They will all come to care for you and appreciate you truly. And you shall love Leonard with your whole soul, and he may love you as the one woman in the whole world, and I shall never be cross

or jealous or resentful, but thoroughly satisfied. And now we must go to bed and get a little of what Aunt Julia calls 'beauty sleep,' for we never had a wink of it last night."

She was such a pretty, dainty, winsome little thing, Lyndell thought for at least the hundredth time. There was a little triumph at the assurance of all she had conquered, of the prejudices they had all conquered. It was the old dream come true, not by force of will and power, but force of truth and love.

The next day they were all at Beaumanoir. Little Densie had won everybody by her half shy, cunning sweetness.

"Oh, do you remember when I lay stretched out here in this room, and you and Con came over?" asked Leonard, as he and Tessy were exploring every nook and corner of the house. "Dell was awfully stingy of you both, and I had to coax and coax. What a ghost of a fellow I must have been! You were all so merry, and yet I can recall the look of divine pity in your eyes. But I was horribly jealous of Con! I thought I never would be good for anything, and he would come and carry off Dell. She was splendid through all that weary time. You were just a little girl——"

"I am only a year younger than Dell," bridling with pretty dignity.

"You will stay sixteen forever, like your mother."

Tessy laughed. None of these mothers by nature or by grace were quite as sweet as hers.

Con had been back and forth from the doctor's with bulletins. Bertram wasn't so well to-day.

Milly had some interesting things to tell Dell. A letter from Mr. Southgate, that she must take to Ber-

tram to-morrow, and an application for a story that he would be so delighted about.

“When we get over all this holiday time I must go to work in good earnest,” Millicent said, her eyes fervent and shining. “There is an enchantment in it, and the success gives me fresh inspirations. Later on I am going to invite some people down that you will be delighted to meet. Dell, I think we shall have a lovely summer! And there will be Bertram’s letters. He has promised to visit Luckenwalde.”

The places where Millicent had been would be dear to him. Dell kissed her with a pang that had no envy in it now, that would presently be overgrown with sweetness and rejoicing.

CHAPTER XXII.

“AND HAVING NOTHING, YET HAS ALL.”

“DO you know you have not been near me for three whole days? I have been quite a hero, but this Mordecai has refused to come in and pay me due honors. Even father remarked it. Aunt Neale, sweet soul, found a thousand excuses, but I hold it against you. What shall be done——”

Leonard had picked up Bertram and brought him over, and was to take him to Beaumanoir.

“Tessy shall be my Esther to plead. She disarms everybody,” said Dell smilingly. “Shall we go in?”

“And find lovers, as the song has it, ‘In every other spot’? No, let us sit down here. My physician advises that I remain out of doors as much as possible. He would have taken me driving himself, but he was afraid of the wearisome miles. And Len came to hand. But I had told Milly I would be over to-day. Still, father admits that I am a very good patient.”

She drew the large willow rocker out of the glare of the sun that found its way through two tall trees at this time in the morning. He dropped into it.

He was still very pale. Part of it was driving through the wind, but his eyes were tired and sunken. The tired look showed as he leaned his head back.

There was a line in his cheek at the side of his mouth, that she had never seen before. In his father

it was a deep, laughing wrinkle. His nose was more in the Greek pattern, and showed the falling away as well.

"Len takes it awfully hard," he said, with a bright, amused laugh. "Tessy Murray is just the girl for him. She can wind him round her finger."

"Now," admitted Dell, rather unwillingly. She could not all at once assent to this fascinating power.

"She always will. You are the stronger intellectually, but you would have been in bondage to him. I am glad you did not marry him."

A color came up in Bertram's face, but vanished in a few seconds. He glanced at her, then away.

"He did not really love me," she said frankly.

Had she cared very much for him? Was she feeling hurt and sore? The grand thing was that one overlived the soreness.

"Sherburne House stood between." Was it mortifying to admit it, Bertram wondered. Had not she failed nobly in giving it back. The real honor was hers. "And it was the strongest, best thing he ever did in giving it up. The world isn't made of unusual people, but just plain everyday ones, even if they are put in handsome bodies. The remarkable and heroic actions come only now and then. We should get too tense and topple over, to be kept up to concert pitch all the time—or snap—and we might be good for nothing afterward. But I never looked to see Len in such dead earnest. He is one of the high-bred, proper sort. I suppose it is the repression working through. The astonishing thing to me is that he did not give up Tessy last winter, when relinquishing was made easy and holding on hard."

"That shows how much he really loved her."

"She was a little angel all the way through; and Mr. Murray was magnificent. It was honor more than pride. And you managed it splendidly. Your birthday was one of the fortunate happenings."

"There would have been something else, at least a feast made for the occasion," she returned, a little coldly.

"It was lovely!" he went on. "Nothing would have made me miss it but sheer impossibility."

"But you were—you had——" She paused, confused.

"I have been most unwise, and suffer for it. I intended to take a vacation presently, and was doing double work along all the lines. It *was* short-sighted. But I always had so much strength."

"You have grown very thin." There was a touch of the sweet, girlish charm in her face, and it gave him a thrill to see it. He drew a long, half-magnetized breath.

"I don't mind the loss of flesh so much as the almost womanish weakness. I've seen a nurse take as much fatigue without any fuss."

"Physically, but not intellectually at the same time."

"'Burning my candle at both ends,' as father would say. Well, I shall be careful hereafter. I love to live. Do you know what that means, heiress of Sherburne House? The world is a splendid place for talent and energy and strength. But its demands are tremendous. It's odd, but I did miss Tessy in the winter. I used to drop in at Mr. Murray's so often for ten minutes or half an hour. No one talked to me. Tessy played or sang, or just sat quiet, or perhaps said half a dozen words now and then."

Yes, everybody found her lovely.

"She will keep Leonard up to his best on the household side. He has certain ambitions, and has shown strength of purpose. Len is one of the fortunate mortals to whom things come. There are a great many mysteries to life, beside the one awful omnipresent mystery we all carry about within us."

Dell did not answer. Did everybody revolve about Leonard, as the doctor had once said?

"You haven't apologized for neglecting me," he began presently with a smiling look in his eyes. "I ought just to have come in and wished you joy, and excused myself. Then you might have neglected me three whole days with a good reason."

The complaining tone was so much like his father's comical fault-finding that she laughed. They had been such good, natural friends it was hard to be on guard all the time.

"Three days!" with mirthful resentment. "Why, on Wednesday morning the friends and relatives were going away, and I had to be Miss Sherburne, hostess. Then before supper Leonard made his announcement, and my uncle's family were all here. On Thursday we all went to Beaumanoir. Yesterday the Murrays started for home——"

"And you were over to Ardmore——"

"I had to go in and see Mr. Whittingham. I have been very busy, and you had Con and Milly and Leonard and so many."

"Even Tessy!" He smiled with a vague, curious softness.

Dell's heart beat with unwonted rapidity. She had made the little things an excuse for keeping away. She had been so accustomed to the first place at the

doctor's, and now she was trying to slip gracefully into the second.

"You are going abroad," she said, drawing a quick breath. Was she warned by some subtle fear?

"And I hate to go alone. When I think of the splendid time all you young people had together, I wish I had come over and been young with you! I shall have to go backward to catch up." He laughed with an odd, fascinating anticipation.

"But youth is so full of mistakes." Would he have judged Millicent's choice a mistake, she wondered?

"Because we try to do so much—we are too strenuous. We want to be old and wise and reach the high places too soon. Then, at middle life, we have had it all, and are tempted to cry out that all is vanity. We lose our hold on everything. I don't want to. I want a long, lovely, satisfying life with some prosperity, some fame, a big chance to help suffering humanity, and a very real life of my own. Manlike, I want a good deal of love in it—as much as Leonard is going to have."

There was a glow on his thin cheeks, a luminous expectation in his eyes. He was not looking quite at her, but past her; yet he felt the emotions coming and going in her face. Did he want the translation just now? Would she know of a surety herself?

"Well?" with a sudden change of mood, recovering from the lapse of thought, "what do you mean to do?"

She blushed scarlet, taken by surprise.

"Whatever is right and best," she replied slowly. "Just now everything seems to be adjusted on certain lines. I have come into my inheritance," smiling

and raising her eyes, and finding after all she could meet his bravely. "It has duties and pleasures. I think I owe Aunt Aurelia some care. I certainly owe it to Aunt Julia, that she shall be more relieved from the responsibility and have more of her own life. Then there will be Millicent——"

"Yes, Milly is counting a good deal on you this summer. You two will be left——"

Leonard came hurrying out. "Will you mind if I cut short your call, Bert? You can come over next week and spend days on this delightful porch, while I am mewed up in an office, where even the voices of spring smack of legal lore. I have a plan for to-day——"

"Come with me," said Bertram, in a tone of entreaty. "Milly will be glad to have you."

Was he like Leonard, were all men alike in this respect, that they wanted adoring audiences?

"You simply can't have her. Dell and I have some plans," he returned, in his gay, imperious manner. "I have only to-day, for I must go back on Monday. Oh, why isn't life half holiday at least?"

Lyndell made no protest. Bertram rose reluctantly.

"Why, I haven't seen anybody," he exclaimed suddenly. "Miss Sherburne, Miss Carrick——"

"Well, suppose someone else takes you over? We are to have some luncheon and go over to Strawberry Creek, and then anywhere, at our own sweet will."

Yes, he would have all next week. "Never mind about me. I do want to see Miss Sherburne," Bertram said.

"Run and get ready, Dell."

She was a cousin again, to be ordered about, to be made a convenience, a confidante. It was better than

going over to Beaumanoir. So she went indoors to Tessy.

"It is his last real pleasure day for a long while," Tessy said, with appealing eyes.

Dell kissed her with a smile. Her own individuality would come later on. Just now it was the things of to-day.

And the day had been made from all time for lovers. Lyndell watched the exuberant ones; she saw, in a picture, the other graver ones. Did Bertram want Millicent to be young again, and have the great gladness prepared for her that had been gathering sweetness and strength all these years? She, Dell, would not think of next week or next month when they were all away. Whether things happened or not, she had just to go on, and take up the little duties. Not reaching out for great things; she had not attained unto them. A fortnight ago she had looked upon her life as a failure, her short twenty-one years, and wondered what she would do with the other forty or fifty.

Did it appear brighter because she had given up the old restless striving? To love her neighbor—that was the creed of her to-day. To be satisfied with the many loves in their varying qualities; and if the one greater than all never came, to rest securely in the others.

There was a soft, rainy Sunday, just such as fields and woods love after weeks of spring sunshine. Dell and Aunt Julia drove in to church, and the beautiful spiritual calm was refreshing. Milly was more Madonna-like than ever. But Dell slipped her hand in Aunt Neale's arm and walked down the country path under her umbrella.

"We have missed you so!" declared Miss Neale.

"But I know how engrossed you have been all the week. My dear, it seems as if God had taken all the thorns out of the way, doesn't it? I was talking last night about your first visit to us, and what a troublous pilgrimage it looked like. You have come into that other inheritance that is promised to those who faint not in well doing. Bertram is cordially enthusiastic over Leonard's choice—he has known Miss Murray so long. What a fine, breezy, inspiring young man that Con is! You all get called so by your Christian names."

"And Bertram?" she suggested inquiringly.

"He was not so well this morning. He and Millicent had a long talk over literary matters. He believes it the right thing for her, and somehow, she looks like a genius or a saint. Oh, you haven't heard! They want Bertram to sail on Saturday. His passage is really engaged, and Dr. Bethuyne, one of his preceptors, is to go over to attend some convention. There are so many new discoveries all the time. It wears one out to be in the hurry and rush."

"Will he go?" They paused at the end of the path.

"They count on the sea voyage. There is no organic trouble of any kind, but just exhaustion. He shouldn't have stayed so late that night of the party; he scarcely stirred from the sofa the next day. He is so used to being strong he does not know how to manage his own weakness. He can't believe it just like any other person's. Yes, doctor thinks he may as well go."

Aunt Julia was waiting at the carriage.

"I'll be sure to come in to-morrow," said Dell, with her good-by.

Leonard was to leave with the early train in the morning, but he missed it purposely that he might have another visit at Sherburne House. Since the next train went at two he remained to dinner, and Dell drove him over with Tessy, "to lengthen out the farewells," she said, in an amused manner.

Then they went to Dr. Carew's.

Bertram was very much improved. Sunday had been such a restful day.

"I liked the rain so. I don't know when I have listened to a country rain before. There was a whole fairy orchestra in it. One may even have too much sunshine," with the shadow of a laugh.

"It was because you had a quiet day," said Miss Neale. "No one came in."

"I tried to write some verses, the day moved me so; I wondered what being a poet would seem like," he said mirthfully.

"Did you succeed?" asked Dell.

"No, I didn't. I shall send the skeleton to Milly. We talked stories and discoursed on love, Saturday, and I did get too excited. I don't wonder genius is absorbing. Aunt Neale told you—about sailing next week?"

"Yes," turning her eyes away.

"I wanted to stay long enough for you all to miss me; to enjoy some good times, without having Len to take the cream of everything. I believe I am jealous."

Dell was twisting a bit of paper back and forth, and half listening to Tessy and Miss Neale.

"It is quite a pity not to have everything to yourself. I am surprised at the insatiable appetites of—men." She was going to say lovers, but checked herself.

“ ‘Man is not a happy animal. His appetite for sweet victual is enormous,’ ” Bertram quoted. “ ‘Poor Carlyle! And there was Jeanie with a heart full, waiting to be asked——’ ”

“ ‘Wasn’t it worth asking for?’ ”

“ ‘Yes, yes! Any good thing is worth asking for. In prayer, in words, in deed.’ ”

Why did she keep her face turned away? She was usually so frank, so ingenuous.

“ ‘Oh, about your going?’ ” Dell asked suddenly.

“ ‘Dr. Bethuyne and Dr. Cray were to go together, but something interferes, and Dr. Bethuyne insists I shall share his stateroom and have his services. He is so strong and good. I’ve always adored him for his curious little likenesses to father. Yes, the telegram went this morning.’ ”

“ ‘And when must you leave?’ ”

“ ‘Father will go up with me. We take the Thursday evening train from Washington. That gives me Friday to make arrangements. But I am disappointed of my good time down here. I haven’t half seen anyone. Come over and spend a day before I go.’ ”

“ ‘Well—to-morrow,’ ” quietly.

Bertram gave a little sigh.

“ ‘Don’t you want me to-morrow?’ ”

“ ‘Milly is coming. I’d rather stretch out my good things. Especially—you never inquire how long I am going to stay. Three months, six, or a whole year! I suppose it wouldn’t make much difference?’ ”

Dell Sherburne thought she would rather have it a whole year. By that time she would have grown into beautiful sisterhood with Millicent. She would be ready to welcome him back, she could visit in the

home they would have, and share their friends, their pleasures. No place would be quite so dear.

"Dell," in a dissatisfied tone, "what *are* you thinking about, in your rich, inward sight? You are not listening. Are you counting on a year? Well, I shall disappoint you. Three or four months at the utmost."

She started and colored violently.

"It seems to me you have changed in a month or two. You are handsomer; at thirty you will be a splendid woman. But I like the girl's eager, asking, willful, fire-and-softness face. I've strained that last adjective to tell the truth."

"The girlhood has gone. I suppose women do come to have different, more mature expressions."

"Don't let it go!" he pleaded, catching her hand in so sudden and strong a clasp that it thrilled her in every pulse. "You will always be my father's little girl. One of his sweetest memories is holding a sick little girl in his arms."

She turned quite away. Then she said something to Miss Neale, but he still held her hand. He was sitting in the corner of the sofa among the cushions, and she was standing by the arm. Then a flash like lightning went all over her! Surely it was the touch of throbbing lips on her hand!

"Couldn't they spare you?" asked Miss Neale. "I don't know when you have stayed a night. You and Miss Murray? They will start about four. Then, if you will come over at five—— Oh, better still! come over and say good-by to them."

Dell took a few steps with leaden-shod feet. She looked steadily at Miss Neale, but it seemed to her she saw nobody. And her voice sounded strange to herself.

"We will come after they are gone, dear Miss Neale. You see Bertram will have to say good-by to Sherburne House, so it wouldn't save him anything."

She gave a strained, breathless little laugh. "And if you want us on Wednesday——" she added.

"Oh, no! come on Tuesday; Millicent will be here. Wednesday we shall be fussing about matters, and Bert ought to have a rather quiet day; just a drive with his father, perhaps."

"I believe I would rather come on Tuesday"

It was settled that way. Bertram said good-by in a sort of muffled voice. Miss Neale kissed them both.

"Bertram doesn't seem a bit like himself," began Tessy. "Oh, isn't that funny! I always say Dr. Carew at home, but here it makes such confusion. And you have all been like relatives. You know we haven't a cousin nearer than India. I believe the first time I was here I almost envied the large interest. I do hope the sea voyage will improve him. It is supposed to be the best thing."

Dell was glad to have Tessy talk. The sound of a voice kept her from dreaming over the one strange, daring thought that held her in thrall. If she chose, said the tempter, could she not enter the lists with Millicent? She might win even with that rare, early remembrance, against her cousin's sweetness and beauty and genius. The subtle consciousness that is knowledge, the blissful companionship—a whole lifetime of it that she had coveted, might be hers with a little effort. Not a sense of duty, as had pervaded her endeavor with Leonard, but just to let one's self drift, to glance up with appealing eyes, to answer with faltering voice. If she had turned at that instant! Had he ever said anything to Millicent? It seemed to Dell

at this moment that she could recall lingering looks, half sentences, little hand clasps—but she had grown up—not like a sister to Bertram, but a child to his father. She had never thought of anything until this last year; before that all had been simple good comradeship. And if she had longed a little enviously, there had never been any tempting assurance in it, only now this glimpse of far sight.

Milly was at Sherburne House. She had come to see if the girls did not want to join her in the visit tomorrow.

No, she could not kiss with a traitor's kiss, Lyndell Sherburne said to herself. Milly had the first right, and she would hold it inviolate. There should not be any touch of accusing conscience, any question as to whether she had taken what was not rightly hers.

She had brought a little story over for Dell to read to Cousin Carrick. And when the lamps were lighted and Milly, in spite of coaxing, had gone home in the spring twilight, Dell read the pathetic little tale to her three listeners.

"Why, it's almost like Maria and me, only it is made so beautiful, dressed up in all the sweetness of a lovely dream. You could not imagine the outcome of a simple little circumstance might be that! I only wish Maria could hear it. She was so fanciful like; always saying 'Now, if this had turned out so,' and putting another ending to things. I'm not sure but it helped along sometimes. Your cousin Milly is wonderful, and then the loveliest of all is her being like common, everyday folks. I don't know how that young man could bear to die and leave her!"

Then how could another bear to defraud her!

They had a delightful day with Miss Neale. Even

if they were all together, Bertram did not seem to mind it. He was ever so much better. There had been no fever and restlessness through the night, and now he declared he was on the highroad to health and that a trip to Europe was an extravagance.

There was a pretty, matronly air about Millicent, as if some sort of possession was assured; and the gentle, advisory tone Bertram used was charming.

A great thankfulness filled Dell's heart that she had not dallied with the subtlety of the temptation. The gladness of a few days ago came back to her, the old resolves gave strength and content. Her very joy comforted Miss Neale as she thought of the pleasure they would take together presently. Everything was being settled all around, and one could slip back into the old grooves. Thank Heaven! they were going to keep Lyndell. Neither lovers nor the demands of genius would interfere just yet.

Milly had sketched out a little sort of itinerary for part of Bertram's German tour. She and Dell talked eagerly about it.

"I shall not do everything now," he said. "Later on I shall no doubt go again, perhaps not just to get rested. I don't believe anyone ever enjoys it so well alone."

"No, comparing views and experiences adds so much," she returned smilingly. "And I do hope to go again. There are many places I should appreciate better with my wider knowledge. We get so much richer as we go on."

That was what she, Dell, had to do. But first she should gather the wealth right about her.

It was a delightful day to Miss Neale, with these bright young people around her.

Thursday morning Dr. Carew and his son went out for the few remaining farewells. Miss Sherburne had been rather languid after the dissipation of the birthday party. Tessy was a great pleasure; her soft, exquisite way of moving around had so much picturesqueness without being at all restless. It seemed like the gentle stirring of meadow grasses, and brought a mental fragrance.

The morning had started out quite sharp. They were all in the old sitting room, but the windows were open, and the breath of mingled flavors floated in, with the frequent snatches of song.

"It seems more remarkable to have the doctor go up to New York than to have Bertram cross the ocean," said Aunt Jue. "But I do believe we shall see you back the soonest," glancing at the elder.

"My cup of delight would be brimful if he would go with me," remarked Bertram.

"I'm too old to go jaunting about in that fashion," was the elder's reply. "I shall be glad to get back to my 'ain hame.' Bert doesn't really know about that; no one does until he has a home of his *very* own—and a wife set in it and adored."

The son flushed and smiled, with a tender appreciation.

There was not much time to spend on farewells. They talked together as people are apt to do. There were little laughs to keep off the emotional current, good wishes, hand clasps. They were all in the wide hall, the doctor hurrying out as an advance guard.

Bertram turned suddenly. He had stood aside for two years and more, thinking, fearing, believing that another had the best right to this girl, who shrank

from the look she saw in his eyes, and drew back trembling, alarmed.

He took both hands. It was the merest whisper, but he held her so close that to herself she seemed almost in his arms.

"I cannot go without saying it. You have given me no opportunity. Will you think of me, dream of me, and answer my question, when I come back, in the only way a lover can be answered?"

It was just one rapid breath. The temptation had sought her out. "All this will I give thee"—what wrote it in letters of fire? What brought up Millicent's face? Only this little word, and the fight was finished for all her life.

"Oh, I cannot! I cannot! I have no right——"

She walked out among them, but in the confusion no one noted her pallor. She put her hand over Aunt Aurelia's shoulder, and so was safe. He did not look back at her—was it a girl's startled consciousness at the sudden, abrupt demand? Had there been any other moment in the last week, the moment he had been looking for with feverish impatience, he would not have taken this last one. He would write and explain. Oh, why had he not waited and written! Surely there was no one else! Con was a big, undeveloped boy, where love was concerned; he had a dozen projects in his head, and was as likely as not to start around the world again.

"Bertram!" his father said, noting the set lips.

"It will all come right. I can trust her!"

He would not admit his fear to himself.

"Bertram Carew has improved a good deal since the night of the party," said Cousin Carrick. "It's funny that when people are tired out with hard work

they must run all over Europe. Why couldn't he have stayed a month down here?"

"There is the resting on the voyage," commented Aunt Jue.

"And being seasick!"

"But you soon get over that," said Tessy. "And you really *do* rest, for you can't go anywhere."

They came back into the sitting room. Dell stood idly by the window, looking out. She would not go away to dream over this thing. It confused her so. Could she ever bear to look Millicent in the pure, sweet eyes, if she took it?

"Poor Miss Neale!" said Aunt Julia, with a sympathetic smile. "How she would have loved to cuddle Bertram for a month! I am glad you are going over, girls. It would be dreadful to miss them both."

Dell was like one in a maze. Her resisting thought pulsed and throbbed within her. "For Millicent's sake!" it said in the heart-beats. Tessy would have stood aside and given Leonard up to her. Should she be less brave than Tessy? For she felt far within herself, by some secret intuition, that Millicent loved him.

She would rather have stayed at home than linger about in the places where he had been. But Miss Neale gave them such a heartfelt welcome. Did she, too, miss the bright young life as she grew older?

The evening came off cool, and they had a fire of pine boughs built on the hearth. They sat one on either side of Miss Neale, low enough for her to look in their eyes as she talked. Were Dell's less bright and shining to-night? and yet she seemed heroic enough for any of the great deeds of life. Tessy

caressed her hand, now and then pressing it against her soft young cheek.

Did Miss Neale almost envy happy mothers of growing girls, and look forward with a touch of dreariness? Possibly Bertram might marry in time to come. He had been so engrossed and so enthusiastic about his profession. She wondered a little that Tessy Murray's winsome ways had not inspired a vital longing. To be sure, there was Millicent.

And would this other dear girl ever be the center of a lovely home, giving and receiving with the grace and adoration of perfect womanhood? She, Miss Neale, had been blessed in many things. She had resigned herself to God's will with the sweetness of a heavenly nature. She had her brother to console, not unlike Miss Sherburne, and the boy had been her comfort and delight. Still, she did not wish this life for Lyndell Sherburne.

Yet Dell was dreaming of it, resolving with the high effort of self-abnegation. The doctor had said more than ~~once~~ she was wastefully heroic. It did not look so to her now, and yet it was a lofty ideal of personal conduct, quite possible to an earnest, impassioned girl.

For she was certain now that Millicent's regard implied a subtle undercurrent of possession. It came out in tender, dainty ways, quite as if one had the right. Oh, did not Bertram understand? The evening of the party, when she had resigned herself so delicately to his entertainment, a hundred little things that came upon Dell with a vivid vision as of second sight! And he must never ask her the question. It was surely a momentary betrayal, and he would see, would remember.

"How quiet we are!" said Miss Neale. "And I dare say Tessy's dreams are the only ones having any sure foundation. Shall we order the lamps?"

"Oh, no, no!" besought Dell. "I like this time between lights."

Then they began to talk of past events and remembrances, and in a moment or two were gay again.

Miss Neale enjoyed them both so much. They made little calls at Beaumanoir and Sherburne House in a dainty, visitor-like fashion. They inspected Miss Neale's school, they visited some of the cabins, they sat in the doctor's study and tried to look wise and grave, and were merry instead. The travelers had reached New York, and Bertram was none the worse.

They did not return on Saturday, they could not leave Miss Neale alone. So they went to church with her, and had greetings from friends and neighbors.

"You are very good to me," she said, with deep feeling. "I thought Sunday would be a rather lonesome time."

She could not enjoy being so busy as in the old days. She liked to rest and read or dream. But late in the afternoon she went out to see a sick baby, and Tessy begged to accompany her. Dell was reading one of Bertram's books, but as the darkness came on she laid it down and looked out at the vague twilight distances.

Who was that trudging along? It looked so oddly like the doctor. Yes, he was coming in. She ran eagerly to meet him. There were some surprised greetings from the servants.

"Oh, we did not expect you until to-morrow!" cried Dell. "Miss Neale will be home presently. How tired you are!"

He drew the sweet face nearer, and kissed it as they entered the room. There was a faint yellow light from the western sky that gave the apartment a soft glow.

“Yes, I have had a long walk—the only way I could get home. I am a foolish old fellow, Dell, and you may laugh at me! I meant to stay over Sunday and hear some of the fine music and preaching, but when my boy waved his hand to me the last time and glided away, the city had no further charm.”

“He was well, and—and happy?”

Did she mean it for a suggestive confession? Had Bertram merely mystified him?

He took her in his arms suddenly, all the longing fatherhood aroused.

“My child!” he cried. “My dear, coveted darling! Dell, I have desired you for my very own ever since the time I held you in the chair over yonder, and you sobbed out your poor little confession on my shoulder. If you hadn’t been a rich girl I should have begged for you, adopted you, kept you always. But I gave you up to Sherburne House. I watched and hoped, and relinquished, and hoped again. And you know now no girl could have a warmer welcome to a father’s heart, when his son——”

“Oh, don’t!” she cried, in a passion of regret. “I cannot come that way. You must see——”

“Dell, do you mean to break my boy’s heart? He has waited so long without a sign because he would not even seem to infringe upon any fancied rights——”

Oh, did she dare believe? Could she answer months hence? Millicent’s fair face rose up before her.

“There is someone else who has a better right, a

claim farther back. I could not come between. Oh, you must have seen——"

She hid her face on his shoulder. Was she his, to comfort again? Yes, he saw the blinding confusion of her conscience.

"Oh, you foolish child!" was all he said.

But that night he had a long letter to write.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A GOLDEN SUMMER.

MILLICENT VON LINDORM sat with a letter in her hand this magnificent June morning, when the glory of earth was touched everywhere with that profound sweetness and meaning that seemed an answering blessedness to one's prayer. She had felt it in her first waking moments, with her first glimpse of the sky full of iridescent colors, where the sun had made the beginning of a new life, a new day.

She was so moved with all beautiful things. They made types and pictures in her mind, and she exulted in having the key wherewith to translate them. Life seemed so delightful, so satisfactory to her. The years spread out like a blessed vision, sweet years in which she should go on gathering in rich harvests and asking friends in to feasts.

But it was to her now as if the day had suddenly gloomed over.

The doctor had heard from Bertram by return steamer. He had only been a trifle seasick, and improved rapidly every day thereafter. He was going on to Germany, partly for the quiet, and to Berlin to meet some medical friends, and to be introduced to other notable men.

This was her first letter. Gay, chatty, friendly, a talk of books, of people, a little of sights, that after all were not so wonderful, considering that you could not

go amiss of them in the great, marvelous world. Just at the last speaking of his own hopes—there had been a half suggestion, a delicately defined reference, that startled her.

They had all grown up so together, like one widespread family. They had taken in Lyndell. She desired truly, she thought, to share all sweet and pleasant things with her, even to knowledges and subtle experiences. Violet had been deflected into a different channel by her love. And now that the fond dream of Leonard had ended, her cousin belonged in some undefined manner to her, to them all.

“It would not be possible!” her thought ran. “She has become a part of Sherburne House. Her life lies there. Aunt Aurelia loves her, Miss Eliza adores her. It is her place in the world. It would be cruel to go out of it, and go she must if—— Yes, she has duties; God sent duties.”

Was there any other thought in her mind? She had not counted on Bertram marrying for years to come. She had been secretly glad that Tessy Murray’s attractions had not appealed to a susceptible side of his nature. He needed the richness of freedom and wide, many-sided life until he came to the full stature of perfectly developed manhood. A narrow, absorbing love would interfere with this.

Was there anything else? Let her look into her own soul and see. She would be satisfied with her aims and their rewards, the delightful garden of the world with its rich fruit and fragrances for her to gather, to share, to give out. She had no selfish desires in that respect. If she had any gospel of love and truth, of graciousness and beauty, had not God appointed her a missionary to carry whatever blessed-

ness she could to others in the short span of life allotted her? To have Lyndell on the one side, a sister by election, who could enter some of the high places with her and rejoice; to have this strong, manly, aspiring nature with his ambitions, his clear, firm sight, his outflowing kindliness, his strong love for humanity, to stand in the middle, so; to have life idealized——

There was a long, blank space in her thought, such as occasionally comes in the deep places. Had she dreamed of anything nearer?

She tried to look at it honestly, frankly, just as she believed God might look at it.

In the years to come she might dream of another home. It appeared sacrilegious now, as she recalled that sudden swift change in all she held so dear. And if Lyndell had duties here, was she quite exempt? Her father had begun to take a great interest in her new life, since it brought her nearer rather than divided them. Her mother leaned upon her for solace and comfort. Here was her little daughter to train, her young sister growing up amid frivolities, and needing some wise guidance. Yes, she had a wide place to fill. She was thankful she had not planned to go out of it; she could truly say she had not.

But to give up her friend—to give up the first place to another!

There was a hurt and tender jealousy. She would keep it a while longer. She would see; men took fancies sometimes and overlived them.

A sound below on the lawn startled her—a sweet, clear voice, and her mother's soft reply, little Nora's laugh.

“Take me wiv you, Auntie Dell.”

"If mamma is willing. Run and ask her!"

Millicent came down slowly. Baby Nora ran against her in her eagerness.

"Oh, Milly! It is a divine summer morning, and every bird is celebrating its praise, every rustle of the breeze adds its soft minor. Come out with me and get inspiration for a poem!"

Dell's fine, supple figure was instinct with energy and grace; the flowing lines of neck and shoulders suggesting suddenly arrested movement subtle enough for a picture. Her brilliant complexion, the moist little sun-brown rings clustering about her forehead, the light of her velvety eyes, the smile that parted the lips, the proud, upright, beautiful face—yes, it was beautiful here in the morning glow. If Bertram Carew saw it——

He had seen it once in the early morning light, when he was fighting for Leonard's life. A vision had come to him in this very spot, but then she was on her horse and all the glow of first youth enshrouded her. He could shut his eyes and see it, he had taken it across the ocean with him. Only one person had ever guessed.

She came down and kissed her, with a touch of pain at her heart. She was not ready to give up her place. There was a battle to fight for the larger issues.

"I cannot go just now. A hundred thanks——"

"Then let me take Nora. I am only going in to Ardmore. Mr. Whittingham is not well. And an errand or two to do——"

"Yes, you may take Nora. And if you want me, I will go back to Sherburne House and spend the day."

"We shall be delighted. Cousin Carrick is rather

out of spirits, not well either. We miss Tessy so much. It is amazing what an amount of clear inspiring mental sunshine there is in her small body. I am trying to do my best, but it is a kind of reflected light, other people's gifts and graces shining through. Yes, we shall be glad to have you."

Then she went her way with pretty, prattling Nora. She had always been so fond of children. Yes, she ought to have them of her very own. The larger living was not merely brain and thought life, but wifedom and motherhood; all the good gifts of God. And a moment ago she had in her secret soul almost relegated her to a round of lonely duty, Millicent remembered. She covered her face with her hands, and prayed for grace to be fair and honest to this young girl, who surely had a right to her own life.

It was an hour or so before Dell returned. She had found Mr. Whittingham at home, lounging in an easy-chair, if ever even the most relaxed attitude of the formal, old-school gentleman could be called that. She brought out the bright stores of her genial mind. She was learning that hoarded wealth had no sweet flavor, so she gave of hers and was twice blessed.

"You have done me so much good," he said, in his thin, quavering voice. "Come again to-morrow. My child, I wonder if you will ever know how glad we all are to have you!"

Were they glad? Then surely she was among the best things of life.

She picked up Milly, going back. Sherburne House was a little dull after all the influx of company. Alice Osborne had been much disappointed at not being able to induce her to return to California with them. They would have had such a lovely time.

"It will be just as delightful a year or two hence," she said. "I don't want to get into the habit of making life all pleasure."

They were very sorry to go without her. Ethel went over to London for the last of the season. Mrs. Lepage was boarding near the convent, and when Florence's vacation came, they were to go to some place on the Maine coast with friends. Tessy had prolonged her stay to the utmost, persuaded by Leonard, who found it much easier to run down to Sherburne House.

He was very much in love, and he did not mind who knew it. For was not real love all the beauty and poetry of life, its grandeur and sweetness?

The engagement created a little stir, but everybody settled to it with a kind of warm interest and approval. Ethel was the only one who said:

"Len, ten years from this time you will realize you have made a great blunder."

The young man had only laughed. But he was beginning to take some serious views of life.

It was a pretty picture, Millicent admitted from her artistic point of view. The two old ladies were on the porch with bits of work for pastime. The summer stillness pervaded everything. Someone was raking paths in the distance; now and then a servant dodged by, or some little woolly heads from the quarters rushed around with shrieks of laughter, unheeded by Aunt Aurelia. Mrs. Stanwood was busy with housekeeping matters, coming out now and then to say a bright word. She had her husband and her children, and her future stretched out into their lives. Their love and service, their aims, and presently their marriages and the "children's children," would keep her in touch with the joy and sorrow of life.

And Dell's future!

Was it to be spent ministering to these elderly lives, and would she, in the years to come, grow old and lonely herself?

She did not look much like it now with her gayety and freshness. Millicent watched her with a curious, new interest. There was a sweet, serene grace about her; yes, she had changed in some mysterious manner.

Later in the afternoon, when the little one and the older ones had gone for their nap; and they were in the hammocks, where the shade was dense and the sun made an infrequent swift ripple through a waving branch, Millicent spoke of this.

"Oh, do you think so?" cried Dell, her face alight with an emotion of gratitude. "I am trying." Then she laughed a little. "Milly, Sherburne House has had so many phases to me. When I get fitted to one, another comes. Perhaps all of life is like that, and so people acquire the wide knowledges for the next one—the other country. I suppose God *does* send what he thinks best. It has puzzled me a good deal. We talk about the effort people ought to make, but if efforts lead them to be dissatisfied——"

"The right effort cannot. We may not like some restriction of to-day, but instead of fretting at it we can be fitting ourselves for the next step. And a great many new things may come to you."

"I had a feeling I must go out after them. I began to despise the common little round, as it is called. And then I remembered St. Peter's vision—there was nothing common. Tessy Murray makes them all divine. You *do* love her, Milly!" with a rather timid venture.

"We shall all end by adoring her to *your* heart's content. I see a great many points where you and Leonard missed, and it is no detriment, either. But I hope something will come to you——"

Dell flushed and turned her face away.

"I suppose every girl dreams of these things at times," she said tremulously. "But I have put it a long way off. I am going to take pleasure in the love and happiness of others. There is so much in the world, one needn't be lonely unless one is very selfish. And I shall try not to be." Then she laughed with a tiny, trembling break in it. "And if I am to follow Aunt Aurelia's footsteps, and be Miss Sherburne for years to come, I want to make Sherburne House just such a delightful household gathering place as she has. I hope you will all flock here with your children. Think how many there may be!"

If a manly, earnest love were offered for her acceptance! And someone stood ready to offer it. Then Millicent von Lindorm could not have raised a finger to hinder—had she really wanted to hinder?

She could not even suggest the most impersonal possibility. These things were sacred to every young girl, and the bloom must not be rudely disturbed. So she began to talk of herself.

"We ought to have some sort of gayety," she said presently. "We might go to Fortress Monroe."

"Are *you* growing restless," Dell asked, with an arch smile. "I am quite content after all our excitements. No, let us just be quiet."

She could take her more into her own life.

"Oh," Millicent began, "I had a letter from Bertram this morning!" Was it not rather ages ago? She seemed to have thought out so many things since then.

"Yes," Dell said, breaking the long pause. A little pallor came up in her face. "Milly, I think you two——" What was it she meant to say? There was a great confusion in her soul. She must be brave enough to say it so that, when the real time came, she could refuse him with no weak longing.

Millicent knew then. "We two have been friends always. You see, Bertram was like a brother to us." Her voice was clear and untrembling. "No one could quite understand who had not seen it from the beginning. And he was so resolved that I should do something worth while when he learned that I could write. I owe him so much! I do not believe I could have found my way out alone. I hope we shall go on being friends all our lives. But it does depend a good deal on the kind of woman he marries. I hope it will be someone we can take in with ourselves."

The soft summer wind made songs as it kissed the leaves, and there was no other sound to break the silence. Dell's lips moved, but there were no words. Had it been a mistake; was Millicent's heart a sweet ghost wandering there at Naples, and all these things her own jealous imaginings?

"I do not know—who would be worthy," she said, with great humiliation.

"That is for Bertram to decide."

"Do you know, Milly," and Dell's voice was shaken with an emotion she was trying to crowd down, "we have had so much to do with lovers that our minds run naturally to the subject. We must turn over a new leaf. Study, I believe, is a good antidote."

Millicent gave a tender little laugh, and the two lapsed into silence again.

Had she dreamed of any new passion coming into

her life? She could not quite tell with truth. She did not want to pry into the secrets of her own soul. It was enough that here and now she relinquished all but the purest friendship. There had never been any lover's caresses; there was nothing one could not remember with clear, exalted sight. Perhaps he had held back for Leonard's sake; she almost knew that it was so.

"We might practice duets; we used to play so well together. I miss Violet in the music."

"Yes," Dell answered.

Aunt Julia came out leading Nora by the hand, dewy-eyed, and with the exquisite pink of childhood's slumber still in her face. Millicent sprang up and clasped her to the throbbing mother-heart.

Some neighbors dropped in, and they kept Milly to tea. Then Uncle Beaumanoir drove over for her.

In the evening, when everybody had retired, Milly answered her letter. "I shall be impatient for you to come and ask your own question," was all she said in answer to Bertram's reference to future hopes.

But Lyndell could not settle her side so easily. She half said to herself she ought not to be so glad, that there would be many grave points to consider in her life. She did owe a duty to Sherburne House.

Some guests came to Beaumanoir, and there were various pleasure excursions, in which Lyndell was gladly included. Millicent watched the young girl with a new and peculiar interest. Why had she never thought of this possibility—for truly she had not. Dell had never leaned largely to lovers and sentiment. Was this why there had been a reserve of her most sacred feelings in Leonard's case? How blind she had been; perhaps a little selfish, as well, in appro-

priating Bertram so much! She recalled the birthday party, and how much he had talked about Dell that evening, little remembrances of her efforts, and all she had gained in love and appreciation. Ah, yes! it had been an almost fatal blindness; only the wise All Father had them in his keeping, and they could not go very far astray. So many small incidents flashed through her mind, shaming her cousinly affection. Perhaps she had been too much engrossed with her own affairs, as her father had feared for her. There was danger. She was not so sure but that she needed to watch and pray against temptation.

Not that there would be any possibility of longing or envying. In the past Bertram had seemed very young to her, and she knew now her own love had kept her from any thought of him. On her return she had been surprised at the full stature of the man, of the development of his powers, the quality that was positive genius. He had gone so far beyond her that he was the leading spirit in the new friendship. She did not deny to herself that his wife would be a well-loved woman and appreciated to the finest fiber of her being. And Dell would be worthy of it.

But Lyndell still put it aside. It seemed too great a thing to dream over. She had so trained herself to repression that after the first delicious flood of possibility she looked steadily at the other view. There would be much to give up—the gain of years, the earnest endeavor of womanhood.

From that Sunday evening Dr. Carew had spoken so incautiously, he had been gravely silent. She half imagined she had dreamed the startling scene. And though Millicent was tenderly sweet, she talked less about him.

They had many things to absorb their attention in the forthcoming book and a journey to New York, where they were both warmly welcomed by the Murrays. Leonard was impatiently pleading for a marriage in the autumn.

"We shall not be grand people," he said. "We can live very comfortably on my income; and when we want anything wonderful in the way of luxury we will go down to Sherburne House and envy its mistress."

"We will do no such thing!" And Tessy put her arms about Dell's neck. "You can only believe half of what Leonard says."

"Which half?" he asked. "That is of importance to me."

They all laughed at that.

Then the grand ball at West Point called them thither. Fanny Beaumanoir, who had graduated with the honor of the most beautiful gown in the class, joined them for this festivity. Archie had passed honorable examinations, and was qualified to do his country service whenever called upon. They went on to Narragansett Pier, where they were to leave Fanny with some of the Floyd relatives, and took various little trips around.

The Murray boys had been sent out to a farm for a while, but their mother was quite satisfied with the comfort of her own home, and begged to remain. There seemed so much excitement all the time. Milly and Dell returned thither for a few days, that appeared to stretch themselves out indefinitely while they were planning for the last of the summer.

"We have been almost everywhere," said Dell, in an amusingly disconsolate tone; "unless we go to Alaska and the Western coast."

"Oh, don't!" cried Tessy, clinging to her.

"No, I want to save something for middle life, something for old age. I should hate to have days come when I had to say 'I had no pleasure in them.'"

"Oh, wiser than Soloman!" cried Leonard teasingly.

"I should like to have a better wisdom than some of his," reiterated Dell. "Even Aunt Aurelia is not saying all is vanity or disappointment."

They seemed to be waiting for some mysterious happening, Lyndell thought. There were whispered consultations, much perusing of newspapers, and one afternoon Leonard rushed up and carried off Con. It was quite in the evening when they returned. Only Millicent was down in the drawing room, and for some moments there was an eager, surprised talking, the voices curiously mingled.

"Dell!" Milly called softly.

She went slowly down. "Who is it?" as Milly took her in her arms and kissed her.

"An old friend. He wants to see you. Oh, Dell! do not allow any foolish scruple to keep you from happiness."

The low whisper had hardly died in her ear when she stood in the room, alone, she thought wonderingly at first, in the dim light. But a tall figure came forward and took both hands.

"Dell, my darling, I have surprised everybody by coming home before the time. But I was well, and Europe held no charm for me compared to the dream I longed to make a blessed reality. A hundred times a day I wanted to hear your voice, to see your face, to read the story in your eyes. And now I can only take one answer; I am not generous enough to give

you a choice. My sweet darling, will you say it? I know you do not love anyone else."

She could hardly breathe in the clasp so unconsciously tight. He could feel her heart throb against his.

"Oh," she sighed, "can I—ought I——" and the voice faltered and fell to the faintest sound, delicious in its very uncertainty.

"That isn't the answer at all. It is whether you love me? Whether you are willing to take me and all my life holds—sorrows, joys, work, maybe illness and care. Does it look promising for a young girl fortunate in some of the world's best gifts? And to have in return a man's highest love and endeavors. Dell, if you have not learned this lesson, will you try?"

Did she need to try? For months she had been fighting against it. Could she let herself go?

"Dell——"

"I love you," she answered simply. Then she hid her hot, blushing face on his shoulder.

He lifted it and kissed it. Her hand held the first kiss he had ever given her, ever given any woman with love's sign and seal. They stood in blissful silence. Oh, was it true?

She was first to break it. The old doubts resolved themselves strenuously.

"Oh, if you *can* understand!" she cried, in a half appealing tone. "I seem to belong to Sherburne House. I have been trying to make my father's home, and Aunt Aurelia's care, the great motives of my life. Have I a right to throw them up for any purely personal gratification?"

"Have *I* no right to be considered? 'For this cause,' Lyndell," and his voice held a sweet, sacred

solemnity. "The story is almost as old as the world, yet it holds in it the essence of all the sacrifices that have ever been, it has the same struggle to any tender, conscientious soul. And I am not sure but Sherburne House, lovely as it is, has been a *bête noire* to most of us. I have wished many a time you were not a daughter of the house; yet, if you had not been, my father would have missed one of the sweetest experiences of his life."

Ah! she knew she had been a great deal to Dr. Carew.

"It nearly wrecked Leonard"—he was smiling a little now, you could discern it in his full voice—"and it has brought many trials to you besides that great generous, misguided effort that the wise Father above frustrated. And it *does* stand between us. When I first began to think of you and all the wealth that would be yours, I said I could never ask the Sherburne heiress to marry me."

"Oh!" she gave a little cry, and seemed to hold herself closer to his heart.

"It was Leonard's right and opportunity. And when the difference happened between you I should have come forward at once, but for this cause. Then I fancied it would be made up. Dell, it was the pang of my life. He did not know how to win your best love, he had not the key to your heart and soul and brain. But I was amazed when I found Tessy Murray had captured this big, handsome, self-engrossed fellow and brought out what was noblest in him. I think it strikes us all as a bit of curious poetical justice. Only, Dell—I wonder what you would give up for the man you love? For he would rather take you without it."

He held up her face, full of blushes and tears.

"Oh!" she cried, "you do not mean Sherburne House?"

It was too great a sacrifice. But his voice was very tender as he said, in a half-smothered tone:

"You would have to come to me. I could not go there to you. It is not the sphere in which I could do my best work. Yet it will always have some dear associations for me."

She drew a long, quivering breath.

"If you think I might—give it away——" Her voice was like a timid child's, and thrilled him with the deliciousness of its abandonment.

"Would you like—my darling? This is a matter that concerns you deeply. But without it you still have twice too much for me. A man's pride is in caring for his wife, in providing for her; an old-fashioned doctrine, perhaps, but not quite obsolete."

He laughed in a wholesome, hearty fashion.

"Leonard loves it so much," and her voice had a beguiling inflection. "He was brave, to relinquish the dream of his life. And Tessy seems to fit in there. She isn't a city girl at all, nor a modern girl, nor a striving intellectual girl, while she has a wide intelligence and a keen appreciation of all beautiful thoughts and things, and what is quite uncommon—a love for and a rare knowledge of how to make old people happy. I am afraid I shall always be too young, too strenuous. Mr. Whittingham explained to me the other day about making a will." Her voice fell a little. "He said if I had any choice of how the property was to go—that it would not make me die any sooner," and she gave a nervous little laugh. "I thought then I might live to be old and spend my days there, and if

it was left alone some time I should like to think of Tessy and Leonard there. And if, like my great-grandfather, I bequeathed it to them, their heirs and assigns forever——”

“Then you *had* thought of it! My darling, if you did it a few years sooner—— Come and sit down. What a careless fellow I am to keep you standing all this while!”

“And for all those years of Mr. Murray's care he would take no remuneration.”

“Yes, I heard about the check;” and he smiled as he settled her on the sofa, still keeping his arm about her. “Mr. Murray has much grandeur of character. And now that bugbear is disposed of for the present, I must talk about myself. Did you wonder I did not write to you? I began oceans of letters. If we had been confessed lovers—but we were not, and I thought of the scruples you were given to conjuring up. You have a certain morbid strenuousness. And I wanted the freshness of the confession as one wants the dew on the rose and the bloom on the grape, the touch of the hand, the giving and delicate withholding that speaks in the eye and the wavering light and shadow on the cheek. No mere letter can express it.”

She was glad it had not come any sooner. It had been a rich, beautiful summer to her.

“Oh, Dell! do you remember the first time I saw you, when you put your soft, girlish fingers over my eyes? I hope you haven't forgotten the trick.” He stopped to press them to his lips. “I had heard so much about the little Sherburne girl. And I think I fell in love with you early one glorious morning. You rode over to Beaumanoir to inquire about Leonard, when we had the first hope. How we all fought for

his life, and I think he will do us credit in the end! I've always carried those two pictures about with me. I should have kept them if I never had gained any right to the others: the older, proud, sweet girl—the wife you will be in my home, if it please God to spare us until that blessed time. And I wonder when you began to care for me?"

Should she tell him all those fond, foolish struggles, the denials, the resolves, the renunciation at last of the love itself, and keeping only an unsullied remembrance? For to lovers love's confession has a rare sweetness of Heaven's own giving. No other hours have the delicious intoxication of that first unalloyed draught. And Lyndell Sherburne's strong, sweet nature had much to give. It could give endlessly and suffer no diminution.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MISTRESS OF SHERBURNE HOUSE.

“YOU will be killed with lovers, Mamma Murray!” Dell Sherburne said to her foster-mother a day or two after. Bertram Carew haunted the house as well as Leonard. He had cut his holiday abroad a month short, but he meant to keep it all the same, though his heart yearned over the suffering and neglect it was his business to fight. But for two summers through heat and fatigue he had stood at his post, and he had been learning a little lesson for himself, that God did not require unwisdom in one’s efforts.

And now there was a new hope to his life. Some one else could justly demand a little carefulness.

Everybody was glad with an exquisite, unfeigned joy. Even Mr. Murray was more than satisfied. If they must lose Tessy their other daughter would come back to them, and he felt a little ache for Miss Sherburne’s loss.

Mamma Murray seemed to be the needed central figure. They were really glad sharp, teasing, satirical Morna was away. Con gave Dell the warmest congratulations.

“You have the best and noblest fellow in the world,” he declared enthusiastically. “Though I *did* hope ten years from this time, when I had gathered up the wisdom and the riches and the experience of the world, that I should come down to Sherburne House and

insist upon your marrying me. Miss Aurelia would be so old by that time it couldn't make much difference who ruled at Sherburne House. And I have lost my golden chance, that only comes once in a man's lifetime. I shall go mourning all my days."

"But you can wait ten years before you begin to mourn," returned Dell mischievously, "since that is your own date."

"And the Murrays will get you back again! Think of that, and weep!"

"Is it a subject for tears?"

"On the other side." He made an odd, mirthful face. "Yet if they miss you as we did," and his voice fell to a soft, endearing cadence, "it will be heart-breaking."

They would be sorry to let her go. Dell knew that.

Millicent's heartfelt congratulations had been a deep and satisfying comfort to Dell. She had not gone so far as to imagine any asking love. She had only to give up the sweet consciousness of being first, but had she been first all these years?

Leonard declared he was like the knights of olden romance; he had sat down to besiege the castle, and he would remain until it capitulated. It did eventually. Tessy said Christmas at first, but days and weeks were pared off until the wedding was agreed upon for October. Then Dell, Millicent, and Bertram started homeward.

"We shall not hurry," he said, with shining eyes; "for we have just begun as lovers, and we want all the sweetness the cup holds. I think Aunt Aurelia will be more lenient if she knows I am willing to wait a while."

Had they been away years? Even Ardmore looked strange to her bewildered sight.

They put Millicent in the Beaumanoir carriage, and said a brief good-by to her. It was not far to the doctor's, but they loitered on the way in the late summer afternoon, and when they reached the old house they saw him winding slowly around the curve in the shrubbery. So they hurried in.

Here in the old office, where she had crept in and blindfolded his eyes! "I was sitting here," he said, kissing her. "You were a pretty young girl even then, and my father always declared you would make a beautiful woman."

"He taught me how to make myself beautiful." There were fond tears shining in her eyes.

A stout figure, a little bowed, stood in the doorway. The hair had grown whiter, the wrinkles deeper, but the eyes were tender and merry and full of love.

"I've brought her to you, first of all," began Bertram, in a voice freighted with emotion. "We two are to own her and share her love, but I have the largest share, just as I have taken the best and most of everything all my life."

Dr. Carew clasped her in his arms. "Papa," she cried, "I am to be the daughter of your love!" and there was a soft, happy sob in her voice, the tumult of joy.

The daughter he had coveted, his son's wife! He gave her a long, fond kiss in satisfied silence.

Bertram brought Aunt Neale in to share their joy. They would fain have kept her to tea, but she felt they would be awaiting her at Sherburne House.

They were indeed glad to welcome her, and Bertram, who looked quite unlike the pale, thin fellow who, as Con had said, was the ghost of the April feast.

There was so much to tell that no one thought of the new story that they might have read in the fair, blushing face, and the sun-browned, enraptured one.

However, it told itself the next day to everyone's surprise.

"But I shall not go away for a long, long time," she said to Aunt Aurelia, when they talked it over between themselves.

The loveliest word of all was from Uncle Beau-manoir.

"I don't believe I could have given you up to anyone else," he said, much moved by the tidings. "We have always felt Bertram was very near and dear to us for saving Leonard. And we have always been proud of him. My child, I am glad this love has come to you. Only it must take you away from us."

"Never in heart and in affection," she made answer.

From thence she went to Mr. Whittingham's office. She even insisted upon excluding Spencer from the interview.

"I have made my will," she cried, with a dazzling, dancing light in her eyes. "And now you must sign and seal it."

"I hope you took counsel with your uncle?"

"No, I have not. I only took counsel with—with my lover," and she colored bewitchingly. "And he is so afraid my courage will fail, he gives me no peace."

"Your lover!" The old man was amazed. "I hope you have not been overpersuaded," in a sudden alarm. "This is a serious matter."

She stopped teasing and laid her plan before him.

"You don't mean that Bertram Carew is willing

that you should give up this handsome old estate *now*," he ejaculated, in the utmost surprise.

"Oh, he is really eager for me to do it."

"He is very generous, very! But don't let him give all your money away."

"That is to be tied up very securely on myself. And now you must advise me. Uncle Beaumanoir will object. Aunt Aurelia may feel hurt. Everybody will be surprised. I want to do it as quietly as possible. I would rather not do anything until the right moment comes."

"There, child, I must think it over. But you may have children of your own."

"They could not be reared at Sherburne House," she said, with rising color.

"To deed it to him—with no conditions?" The old man stared at her.

"To him and his wife, as she will be then, and to his children. I can't tie it up any further," and she smiled. "I should like him to take the Sherburne name."

"Yes, he ought, he must. Come in a week or so hence. You may change your mind."

"No, I shall not change it." Her face was lovely in its proud decision.

"It would be very just and noble if you——"

"I am not going to wait for old age or death to do my work of love. I want to enjoy it while I am here."

"Well, well, well! I think I had better see your uncle!" Mr. Whittingham declared, after some consideration.

Mr. Beaumanoir was very decided, absolutely strenuous in his objections.

"The whole county will believe we have actually wrested this from you," he said indignantly.

"No one who has known you would even suggest such an idea," replied Dell spiritedly. "Do you not see someone must have it who will keep it up out of pure love? I could not hire anyone to do that. And it will be a part of Aunt Aurelia's dream come true. Of course Leonard will not be able to remain there all the time for some years to come, but now Aunt Aurelia is still quite strong. You will make her happy; think of that! And if it is my wedding gift to Tessy and Leonard!"

She was so happy herself in these days, so winsome and loving, that they could deny her nothing. A pretty air of authority that really ruled very little but sat graciously upon her, and a sweet, generous interest in all things bound them more closely to her. But Dr. Carew's affection had a sacred nearness for her. Never had they talked over the old times more delightedly.

Millicent was beginning to reap the publicity of her sudden fame, rather to her father's disgust. Yet there were some charming pilgrims who found their way to Beaumanoir, and Lyndell enjoyed meeting them.

Another event that gave her great satisfaction was the rather unexpected *début* of Anita Garcia, first at Milan, then at Florence. In certain rôles her voice was pronounced marvelous. She wrote to Dell full of joyous intoxication at her triumph, and with a tender gratitude hardly expected.

"The days *do* go so fast," Dell complained one morning. "And now Milly and I will have to go up to New York and supervise this wonderful wedding. The bride, it would seem, has nothing to say about it. Leonard has decided on a church wedding with all the attendant splendor. And Fanny, it seems, can be the

only Sherburne bridesmaid, lest the bride will be dwarfed. But the maids and the ushers are to stand around, and we are to be in superb gowns and everything."

Fanny Beaumanoir was much elated, and really fell in love with the Murrys. Aunt Aurelia and Cousin Carrick made the journey, and even Mr. and Mrs. Longworth graced the occasion with their presence. It was a pretty wedding with a two hours' reception, and the bridegroom looked serenely triumphant.

They stayed for a little visit with Mrs. Murray while the two went out on their journey, that was to take in various places and end at Sherburne House. Dell took Morna home with her, and she was to have a bit of Washington later on, under Tessy's matronly wing. And though the little mother said good-by with tears in her soft, shining eyes, she would not have them less happy than herself, since it was God's hallowed way.

It was magnificent October weather, and it lapsed over into November, bringing the young bride home amid floods of sunshine and tender greetings. They had a grand family party at Beaumanoir, and the next night one at Sherburne, with only the nearest and dearest friends.

Leonard brought his pretty bride out in her white wedding gown and the quaint rubies Aunt Aurelia had sent her, to grace the head of the table. She had a faint, exquisite touch of foreignness, and a lovely dignity that made her taller than her inches.

Mr. Whittingham stepped forward. "In behalf of Miss Honora Lyndell Sherburne, I am empowered to present a wedding gift to Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Beaumanoir," he began. "That no one may remain

in ignorance of the gift or its conditions, I will give myself the pleasure of reading it aloud; merely premising that it has the full assent of Miss Sherburne's trustees."

They listened curiously at first, then with intense emotion. Sherburne House and estate, with all pertaining to it except some certain plate and household adornments, to Leonard Beaumanoir and his wife, Tessy Murray Beaumanoir, and their heirs and assigns forever; chargeable with the life interest of Aurelia Sherburne and Eliza Carrick.

There was a strange silence, and all eyes were turned on Lyndell.

Leonard came around. "Oh, how could you!" he cried, with intensity. "How could you all allow her to do it? Bertram, you surely have something to say!"

"I said it the first night of my engagement. We both decided. Oh, we have taken almost three months to it!" with a bright, heartsome laugh. "We have not been over-hasty. And I hope, we both hope, you will enjoy rare happiness under its roof."

Dell put her arms around Tessy and kissed her with a full heart. It seemed the most blessed moment of her whole life. Then she turned her around to face everybody, and glancing out of luminous, satisfied eyes, said a little tremulously:

"The new mistress of Sherburne House!"

THE END.





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